

CALIFORNIA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW **STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT**



December 11, 2007



CDSS

CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

744 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814



December 11, 2007

Dear Friends:

I am pleased to submit California's Statewide Assessment as part of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). This assessment lays the foundation for evaluating California's performance in child welfare and systematically building program change. I recognize that examining a system as large and complex as ours is an enormous undertaking that requires support and commitment of stakeholders statewide. It is with deep appreciation that I extend my gratitude to each of you who assisted the California Department of Social Services in this endeavor.

I would first like to acknowledge the over 500 participants who took time to participate in focus groups and the Statewide Stakeholder Convening. By sharing your expertise, experiences, and perspective, you ensured that California's assessment broadly represented the system change milestones we have achieved and the challenges that are before us. I would also like to thank the dozens of child welfare staff and partners throughout the State who assisted the Child and Family Policy Institute of California in bringing together stakeholders for the various focus groups.

California benefits from established ongoing collaborative efforts and is very fortunate to have had the support of those partnerships throughout the assessment process. I would like to extend a special thank you to the State Interagency Team; CDSS Indian Child Welfare Act Workgroup; California Welfare Director's Association committees; Chief Probation Officers of California; the University of California at Berkeley-Center for Social Services Research; and, the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children and the Courts.

The assessment could not have been completed without the tremendous work of the Steering Committee, Statewide Assessment Team and Data Committee. Individuals participating on these groups provided invaluable input to the assessment of California's child welfare services. These dynamic groups represented a wide range of stakeholders who are listed in this report.

I would also like to thank Los Angeles, Fresno and Santa Clara counties for their participation in the onsite case review. I sincerely appreciate the effort that is being put forth to prepare for the review and to welcome the review teams.

California will continue to work diligently to build upon program and systemic changes already underway and utilize the Statewide Assessment to inform future activities as we move into the development of our Program Improvement Plan. The CDSS joins our federal partners and other states in working toward improving outcomes for the children and families we serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary L. Ault'.

MARY L. AULT
Deputy Director
Children and Family Services Division

Table of Contents

SECTION I

Introduction	5
--------------------	---

SECTION II

Description of Initiatives, Practices and Collaborative Efforts	15
---	----

SECTION III

State Data Profile	27
--------------------------	----

SECTION IV

Narrative Assessment of Child and Family Outcomes	47
Safety	48
Safety Outcome 1	48
Safety Outcome 2	56
Permanency	63
Permanency Outcome 1	63
Permanency Outcome 2	83
Child and Family Well-Being	94
Well-Being Outcome 1	94
Well-Being Outcome 2	103
Well-Being Outcome 3	106

SECTION V

Systemic Factors	111
A. Statewide Information System	112
B. Case Review System	120
C. Quality Assurance System	133
D. Staff and Provider Training	142
E. Service Array and Resource Development	153
F. Agency Responsiveness to the Community	160
G. Foster and Adoptive Home Licensing, Approval, and Recruitment	168

SECTION VI

State Assessment of Strengths and Needs	181
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INTRODUCTION



Agency Structure and Overview of California's Child Welfare Services

California's state-supervised child welfare system is administered at the local level by 58 counties, each governed by a county board of supervisors. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) regulates and monitors the delivery of services through individual county governments. Funding for child welfare services is a combination of federal, State, and county resources. The range of diversity among the counties is immense and there are many challenges inherent in the complexity of this system, however, its major strength is the flexibility afforded to each county in determining how to best meet the needs of its own children and families. As the most populous state in the country with over 9,000,000 children, California's rich culture and ethnic diversity includes 224 languages, 109 federally recognized Indian tribes, and an estimated 40-50 non-federally recognized tribes. The State's counties differ widely by population, economic base, and are a wide mixture of urban, rural and suburban settings.

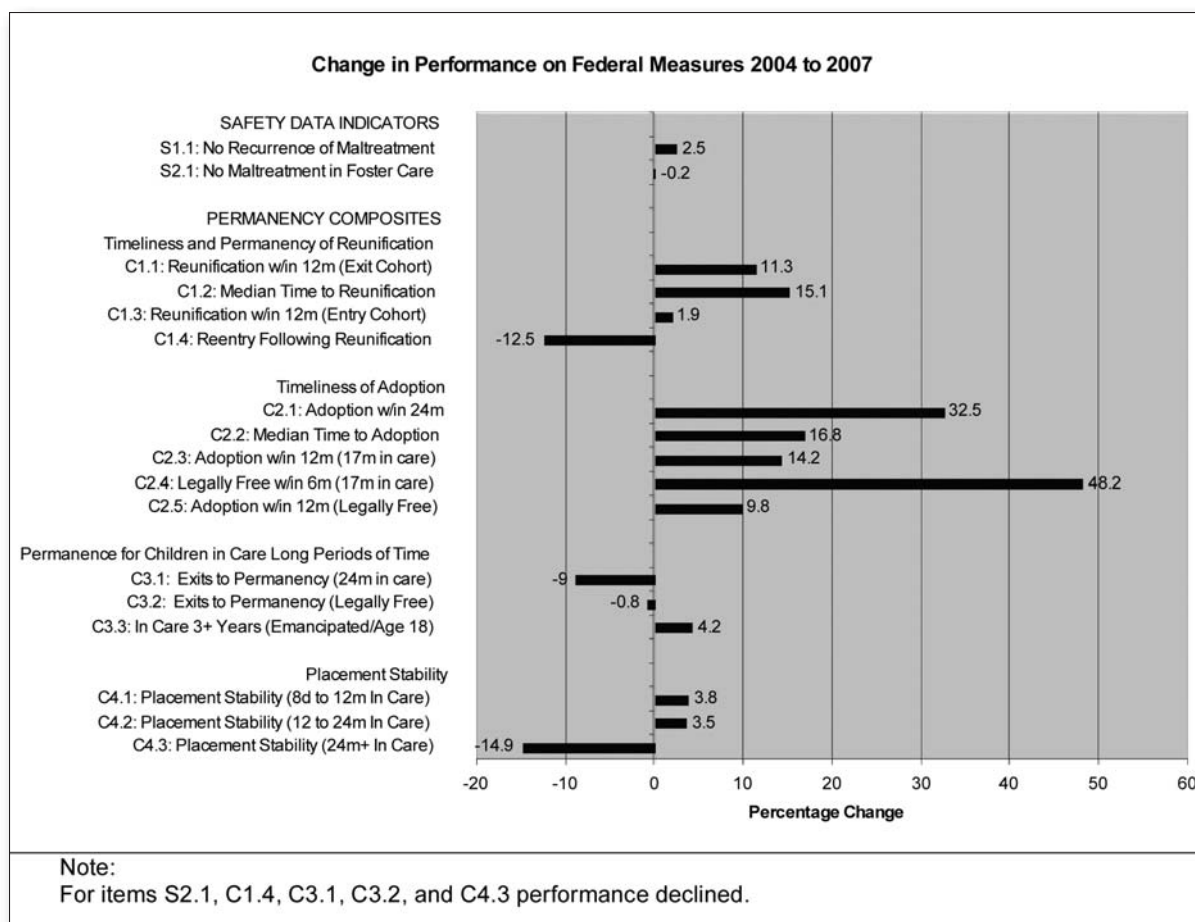
The CDSS is the agency authorized by statute to promulgate regulations, policies and procedures necessary to implement the State's child welfare system and to ensure safety, permanence and well-being for children and families. Within the statutory and regulatory framework, counties are charged with providing the full array of services necessary to meet the needs of at-risk children and families.

Where have we been?

In 2002, the State completed its initial Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) which resulted in a finding of non-conformance in twelve of the fourteen areas assessed. The State was not in substantial conformity with any of the seven outcome areas and five of the seven systemic factors. The two systemic factors that were in substantial conformity were related to the statewide information system and agency responsiveness to the community. Concurrently the State was undergoing a redesign of its child welfare delivery system to improve outcomes for children and families. The core of the redesign focused on the ability of the State and county child welfare services agencies to build community capacity to better serve at-risk populations and to improve accountability to families for positive outcomes. The four key strategies of the redesign were:

- Implementation of the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) oversight system
- Implementation of an alternative response system, known as Differential Response, in targeted communities
- Implementation of a Standardized Safety Assessment System, which assesses the safety, risk and needs of children and families
- Engagement of youth

These strategies played a significant role in laying the foundation for change in the State and served as a catalyst for system improvement and ultimate achievement of eleven of the twelve Program Improvement Plan targets. The following chart reflects progress made since 2004 and reflects efforts made at the federal, State and local level to achieve better outcomes for children and families.



Where are we now?

The Children and Family Services Division (CFSD) of the California Department of Social Services plays a vital role in the development of policies and programs that support its vision of "Every child will live in a safe, stable, permanent home, nurtured by healthy families and strong communities." The goals of CFSD are to: prevent child abuse; provide services early to prevent foster care placement; assure foster care placements are short-term and children reside in safe, permanent families; and, prepare and support transitioning youth to be self-sufficient and independent with a permanent adult connection.

Over the last three years, CFSD realigned its organizational structure to support continued system improvement. The National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement provided technical assistance to assist CFSD in 1) determining how to better align program areas to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes; 2) identifying infrastructure needs to support continued systemic improvements; and 3) exploring how to use the CFSR process as an organizational tool to support the focus on outcomes. As a result of this work, program areas were reassigned to facilitate technical assistance to counties, an Outcomes and Accountability Bureau was established, and, a new unit will be dedicated to the Child and Family Services Review and subsequent Program Improvement Plan implementation.

California's new outcomes and accountability system is built on an open and continuously recurring three-year cycle of self-assessment, planning, implementation and review. The C-CFSR replaced the State's Division 31 compliance review process and shifted the focus from compliance to an outcomes driven process supported by State technical assistance. State oversight is now provided in conjunction with county peer quality case review, self-assessment, and a system improvement plan process all of which is based on quantitative and qualitative data.

The triennial cycle began in June 2004 and as of June 2007, all 58 counties have completed one entire cycle. With the aid of the initial CFSR and subsequent Program Improvement Plan processes, coupled with the implementation of the C-CFSR, the State is better able to analyze program areas and develop specific policies and improvement strategies to promote positive outcomes for children and families. While successfully shifting program focus toward improved outcomes, the C-CFSR process is still considered to be in its infancy.

The State has completed the preliminary evaluation of the Child Welfare Services System Improvement Pilot Project underway in eleven counties (Contra Costa, Glenn, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Placer, Sacramento, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Stanislaus, Tehama, and Trinity Counties). Early results indicate the pilot counties are achieving desired outcomes. Three strategies are being piloted in all eleven counties: Standardized Safety Assessment System, Differential Response, and Permanency and Youth Transition programs. The challenge to statewide implementation is to maintain model fidelity and obtain sufficient fiscal and staff resources.

Although all 58 counties have implemented the Standardized Safety Assessment System through utilization of either Structured Decision Making or Comprehensive Assessment Tool, counties are in varying stages of implementation; the final group of counties implemented these tools during Spring of 2007. The implementation of these tools ensures that safety, risk and needs are assessed for each child for whom child welfare services are to be provided, including gathering and evaluating information relevant to the case situation and appraising case service needs. The reassessment of needs is conducted throughout the life of the case, as the service and permanency needs of the child and family dictate.

Recent efforts through partnerships with philanthropic organizations, public and private agencies and all levels of government demonstrate an increased investment to improve opportunities for California's foster youth. In 2006, California was one of six states chosen to participate in the National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care. These efforts, in addition to changes in practice to engage youth in case planning, focus on meeting individual youth's needs.

The focus of partnering for change is highlighted by CDSS' collaboration with other State and local agencies. At the State level, working towards common goals and alignment of outcomes is occurring with the State Interagency Team and California's Blue Ribbon Commission on Foster Care which are described in further detail later in Section II. The CDSS partners with counties, tribes, stakeholders, and philanthropic organizations to implement activities designed to improve safety, permanency and well being for children served by the child welfare system. Locally, child welfare services agencies are working with Probation counterparts and community based organizations to provide a broader array of services designed to meet the unique needs of their populations.

The Child Welfare Leadership and Performance Accountability Act of 2006 (Welfare and Institutions Code 16540-16545) established within California's Health and Human Services Agency, the California Child Welfare Council, an advisory body responsible for improving the collaboration and process of the multiple agencies and courts that serve children and youth in the child welfare and foster care systems. The Council shall monitor and report the extent to which child welfare and foster care programs and the courts are responsive to the needs of children in their joint care. The Council is co-chaired by Kimberly Belshe, Secretary, Health and Human Services Agency; and, Hon. Carlos R. Moreno, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of California. The first convening of the Council was held November 2007.

Where are we going?

From State Fiscal Years 2001-2002 through 2006-2007 (July 1, 2001 – June 30, 2007), California committed State General Fund dollars to increase program funding by \$440 million, resulting in an overall 23 percent increase, for several child welfare service special projects. Over this same period, county child welfare agencies contributed millions of dollars of their own discretionary funds. These, along with several million dollars in support from philanthropy, have enhanced statewide efforts to promote the safety of children, promote the right to a stable permanent home, and secure child well-being. At this time, however, the impact of projected State Fiscal Year 2008-2009 (July 1, 2008-June 30, 2009) budget shortfalls is unknown. Preliminary projections indicate the shortfall to be significant. This has serious implications for social service and other State programs that are financed by significant State General Fund support.

The State remains steadfast in its commitment to continuous quality improvement of child welfare services. Like most states, California is challenged to meet the newly established federal outcome measures. The California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile of August 29, 2007 (follows the Introduction section) reflects the State is under the national standard in all Safety Measures and Permanency Composites. The construction of the new federal standards requires the State to re-evaluate its progress in light of the recent Profile, particularly alongside the Permanency Composites, underlying components, and weighted measures.

With the revised CFSR measures, comes the need to transition the outcome system to incorporate the new composites into current data collecting and reporting processes. At this writing, CDSS and its University of California at Berkeley (UCB) partners are updating data systems to permit the State, counties, and interested parties to access more user-friendly web-based information to validate progress by county and in the aggregate statewide. Part of this update will include modifications to the new federal standards. Particularly useful will be the enhanced UCB website which has been modified as a “dynamic” website (http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/default.aspx). This feature will permit user-friendly and interactive manipulation of data fields that will improve our collective ability to better assess progress and analyze strengths and needs in performance areas.

Improved data quality and data analysis will be the focus of the State to better enable and support counties’ practice and policy response. This focus includes improving data access and coordination with other State and local partners (e.g. mental health, alcohol and drug, health, education, the courts, and others) in order to better inform and improve the progress and outcomes of services to our mutual vulnerable populations. Improving data coordination and analyses across these agencies is a common theme among multiple work groups, committees, and agencies that will be discussed in this report.

To effect change, CDSS and its partners must continue to work together. Throughout the statewide assessment process, collaboration across systems was identified as a strength within California. As a new cycle of improvements begins, building better partnerships with tribes and youth at the local and State level is critical and must be coupled with continuing collaborative efforts with courts, probation and community based organizations. Our greatest asset is the common ground we share – the safety, permanency and well-being of California’s children and families.

The CDSS looks forward to completing the evaluation of the Child Welfare System Improvements Pilot (known as the Eleven Pilot County Project) in Spring 2008. The State is interested in understanding the effects of Differential Response and how this and other innovative approaches improve outcomes, particularly those related to re-entry and placement stability. The State recognizes that more than thirty additional counties have implemented Differential Response, as resources permit. Although not always true to the Child Welfare Systems Improvements model, the non-pilot counties’ results will also inform CDSS on progress in matching interventions and services with assessment outcomes. Decisions regarding approaches to child welfare practices will be informed by the Eleven Pilot County Project evaluation.

In California, like other states, children of color are disproportionately represented in the child welfare system. African American and American Indian children are overrepresented when compared to the general population of the State. California has taken the following measures to address this concern:

- California Social Work Education Consortium (CalSWEC) sponsored forums for county administrators and managers that feature national experts on disproportionality.
- Infused core training curricula for social workers and supervisors with related awareness information and practice guidelines.
- Established the State Interagency Team's Eliminate Disparities Workgroup to participate as the state level team in the California Disproportionality Project.
- California Disproportionality Project, co-sponsored by CDSS, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Casey Family Programs through the Co-Investment Partnership, will launch an initiative in early 2008 to develop recommendations for policy, practice and cross system changes to reduce the disproportionate representation of children of color in the child welfare system. Up to 14 county child welfare services agencies and their community and interagency partners, including the Eliminate Disparities Workgroup will participate.

Methodology for Developing the Statewide Assessment

The following established groups were utilized as sources of important information for the Statewide Assessment: State Interagency Team, CDSS Indian Child Welfare Act Workgroup, California Welfare Director's Association committees, and California's Blue Ribbon Commission on Foster Care. The CDSS specifically created the following key groups to obtain a diversity of input relating to California's child welfare system:

The STEERING COMMITTEE is composed of various agency and organizational policy and decision-making representatives including tribes, courts, former foster youth, parents, foster parents, community based organizations, and child welfare and probation agencies. The Committee will meet throughout the CFSR process to provide guidance and oversight for the Statewide Assessment, Onsite Review, and Program Improvement Plan.

The STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT TEAM assessed the child welfare services systems in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being, to identify the current strengths and needs and to propose systemic changes. The Team was composed of representatives from tribes, probation, court personnel, former foster youth, staff of county social service agencies serving children and families, parents, foster parents, representatives of foster/adoptive parent associations, CDSS staff, and consultants with expertise in child welfare. Input from the Team is included in the discussion of all 45 items in the narrative section.

A DATA TEAM was convened to analyze the State Data Profile and the new composites. Information from the data team was provided to the Statewide Assessment Team for validation, further analysis, and inclusion into the assessment.

Thirty-one STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS were conducted to obtain a broad range of input on the current state of child welfare services in California. Special emphasis was placed on gathering information from tribes, courts and youth with four (4) separate focus groups conducted with each of these important constituencies. Other focus groups were held with education, mental health, public health nurses, child welfare training academies, adoption, kinship/relative care providers, probation, independent living program providers, advocates, and CDSS staff. Each focus group was composed of representatives from the constituency/target group identified (e.g. they were not mixed groups but maintained a focus on the particular perspective of the indicated constituency). Over 300 focus group participants provided input for three core questions:

1. How is the child welfare agency doing in this area?
2. Have you noticed any changes in performance since the last federal review?
3. What resource issues and/or casework practices in child welfare are affecting performance in this area?

On August 17, 2007, a STATEWIDE STAKEHOLDER CONVENING was held in Sacramento with approximately 225 statewide participants, including probation, courts, tribes, youth, parents and foster parents, education, mental health, faith and community-based organizations, advocacy groups, county child welfare agencies, and CDSS staff. The purpose of the Convening was to solicit input related to child welfare services in California, validate focus group findings, and to identify strategies for continued program improvement. The following themes were common across focus groups, the Stakeholder Convening, the Statewide Assessment Team, and the Steering Committee and are incorporated into the discussion of the 45 items in the narrative section:

- High workload across systems (child welfare, probation, courts and the State)
- Difficulty with compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act
- Improve youth engagement in case planning and decisions
- Increase social worker connections and improve quality of social worker visits

Additional information and data in the narrative section comes from a variety of sources including the State Data Profile developed by the Children's Bureau based on the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (ASFCARS) and National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANS) data submitted by the State. Other sources include: internal data reports; the State's Child and Family Services Plan and related Annual Progress and Services Report; Community Based Child Abuse Prevention report; the previous Program Improvement Plan; counties' system improvement plans; an analysis of the peer quality case reviews across counties; the Administrative Office of the Court's Court Improvement Plan; and, the CDSS statewide survey of foster and birth parents.

Selection of Onsite Counties

The Onsite Review is the second phase of the CFSR and takes place in three counties within the State. Los Angeles County, California's largest metropolitan area is a required site. Fresno County and Santa Clara County were selected as the other two sites. The methodology for selecting these sites is determined on which counties are most representative of the State as a whole in population, ethnic diversity, capacity, and consistency with statewide outcome performance data. Additionally, counties are assessed by such factors as their collaboration with tribes, courts, probation and community partners; implementation of promising approaches such as Family to Family; and, contrasts among counties regarding implementation of the Child Welfare Improvement Project. A description of the methodology and each county is presented in the final section of this report.

Conclusion

California has made improvement in eleven of the twelve areas of safety, permanency, and well-being measures and systemic factors identified in the Program Improvement Plan of 2003 (July 1, 2003-June 30, 2005). To achieve systemic change, California:

- Transformed a system of process measurements to a system designed to achieve continuous and measurable outcome improvement through the implementation of Assembly Bill 636/ Outcomes and Accountability Act and the federal CFSR measures.
- Built on existing efforts to bring key partners together to focus on a common vision and develop common goals and outcomes for our shared population.
- Implemented innovations (redesign) based on stakeholder recommendations.
- Secured legislative support to change child welfare policy and practice.

The improvement processes in place are operational and demonstrating effectiveness. While there is good reason to be pleased with our progress, there remains a need for continued improvement. The new federal measures have raised the bar for performance and California, along with all other states, will be challenged to meet the new standards. The State recognizes it must enhance the momentum that advances the quality of services and systems with a focus on:

- More effective use of data analysis to guide practice decisions as child welfare services transitions to the new outcome system.
- Strengthening partnerships with tribes, youth and community based organizations; and, build upon existing collaborative relationships with courts and probation at the State and local level.
- Evaluating promising practices to determine effectiveness and as resources become available, expand pockets of excellence.

Based on the level of engagement and commitment to excellence exhibited by the various stakeholders involved in the CFSR process and continued levels of program funding, CDSS expects to experience many positive trends in the next several years.

DESCRIPTION OF INITIATIVES, PRACTICES AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS



The California Department of Social Services provides the following descriptions of initiatives, practices, and collaborative efforts that are referenced throughout the narrative of the Statewide Assessment. They are presented alphabetically.

California's Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care

On March 9, 2006, Chief Justice Ronald M. George established the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care and appointed Associate Supreme Court Justice Carlos R. Moreno as its chair. The three-year commission's charge is to provide recommendations to the Judicial Council of California on ways the courts and their partners can improve safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness outcomes for children and families. The commission is a high-level, multidisciplinary body providing leadership on the issues that face our foster children and their families and the courts and agencies that serve them.

The establishment of the commission builds on recent Judicial Council efforts to improve the juvenile courts. These efforts include expansion of the Court Improvement Program to increase the number of training programs and to enhance development of data exchanges between the courts and child welfare agencies; expansion of the Judicial Review and Technical Assistance program to include specific projects related to improving compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act and increasing the number of permanent placements for children in foster care; and, establishment of the Dependency Representation, Administration, Funding, and Training (known as DRAFT) pilot program relating to attorney representation of parents and children in juvenile dependency court. The California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care seeks to achieve four results:

- A comprehensive set of politically viable recommendations for how courts and their partners can improve child welfare outcomes, including an implementation plan with key milestones;
- Improved court performance and accountability in achieving child welfare outcomes of safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness;
- Improved collaboration and communication between courts and child welfare agencies and others, including the institutionalization of county commissions that support ongoing efforts; and,
- Greater awareness of the court's role in the foster-care system and the need for adequate and flexible funding.

In its early strategic planning, the commission determined it would focus on three key areas and developed a comprehensive work plan to guide its work and that of its subcommittees:

- The role of the courts in achieving improved outcomes for children and families;
- Court collaboration with partner organizations and agencies; and,
- Funding and resource options for child welfare services and the courts.

The commission will issue recommendations in Spring 2008.

Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability System

Pursuant to State Law (Assembly Bill 636), effective January 2004, a new Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability System began operation in California. The new system, referred to as the California-Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), focuses primarily on measuring outcomes in safety, permanence and child and family well-being. The new system replaces the former Child Welfare Services Oversight System which focused exclusively on regulatory compliance and brings California's oversight into alignment with the Federal Child and Family Services Review oversight system of the states.

The new system operates on a philosophy of continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of program outcomes. The principle components of the system include the following:

- **Quarterly Outcome and Accountability County Data Reports:** in early 2004, CDSS began issuing quarterly reports with key safety, permanence and well-being indicators for each county. The quarterly reports provide summary level federal and State program measures that serve as the basis for the county self-assessment reviews and are used to track State and county performance over time.
- **County Self-Assessment:** a focused analysis of performance by each county of its own child welfare services program including services provided to probation youth. The county child welfare agency in partnership with the county probation agency work together with public and private organizations, courts, tribes, and the community to complete the assessment.
- **County Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR):** an extension of the county's self-assessment process and is guided by questions raised by the analysis of outcome data and systemic factors. The goal of the PQCR is to analyze specific practice areas and to identify key patterns of agency strengths and concerns for the host county. The PQCR process uses peers from other counties to promote the exchange of best practice ideas. Peer reviewers provide objectivity to the process and serve as an immediate onsite training resource to the host county.
- **County System Improvement Plan (SIP):** developed by the child welfare service agency in collaboration with their local partners; a SIP must be approved by the County Board of Supervisors and CDSS. The focus of the plan is a commitment to specific measurable improvements in performance outcomes that the county will achieve within a defined timeframe. The plan establishes program priorities, defines the actions steps and specific percentage increases in performance improvement. The county system improvement plan is based on the previous two components.
- **State Technical Assistance and Monitoring:** provided by CDSS to monitor the completion of these activities under the C-CFSR for each county, including: ongoing tracking of county performance measures, reviewing county self-assessments for completeness, participation in

peer quality case reviews, and review and approval of the county system improvement plans. The CDSS provides guidance and technical assistance to counties during each phase of C-CFSR process.

Child Welfare Systems Improvement Pilot

The Child Welfare Systems Improvement Pilot is underway in eleven counties. In this report, this pilot project is referred to as the “Eleven Pilot County Project”. The pilot was designed to create an outcome-oriented approach to reducing the incidence of families and children entering the child welfare services system. The three primary strategies piloted in all eleven counties are: Differential Response, the Standardized Safety Assessment System, and Permanency and Youth Transition as described below.

- Differential Response is an alternate way of responding to reports of child abuse and neglect. Referrals are evaluated in terms of statutory definitions for child welfare services involvement for immediate safety considerations; for the choice of a response time for initial face to face interview; and, for the “path” of the response. This approach engages families in services based on the family’s strengths and needs, with a focus on early intervention and community partnerships. Differential Response, an alternative response system that utilizes the following three paths of response priority, is being implemented in targeted communities and/or for identified populations in California.

Path 1: For children with no to low risk of abuse and neglect and who do not meet the legal or statutory criteria for intervention and response. These referrals are referred directly to a community-base organization and do not enter into the child welfare system.

Path 2: For children with moderate risk of abuse and neglect and who do meet the legal or statutory definitions for intervention and response. A child welfare social worker along with a community-based partner will respond and conduct an in-person contact with the family.

Path 3: For children with high risk of abuse and neglect and who meet the legal or statutory definitions for intervention and response. A child welfare social worker will respond to these referrals and conduct an in-person contact with the family. This path is most similar to the child welfare system’s traditional response.

- The Standardized Safety Assessment System is a consistent approach to the assessment of safety, risk, protective capacity, and family strengths. The approach established standards, tools, and protocols used throughout the life of a case to make consistent decisions about child removal and placement. Social workers address safety, risk and needs by gathering information regarding the concerns around the protection of the child, explore the parents’ protective capacity, and identify needs for services. The tools also assess the needs and strengths of the substitute care provider. As cases move forward to comprehensive assessment and service

planning, services and resources are evaluated for effectiveness in reducing risk and potential for addressing necessary changes in family functioning as follows:

- Assessments are performed prior to completing the first face-to-face contact and are recorded within 48 hours.
- Risk Assessments are required on all substantiated and inconclusive in-person responses within 30 days of first face-to-face contact.
- Family strengths and needs (including those of the caregiver) are assessed on all open cases (on initial cases, within 30 days of first face-to-face contact and at each six month review).

Decisions on case closure also address whether improvements have been made that assure the ongoing safety of children.

While the Eleven Pilot Counties were the first to implement the system, all 58 counties are in various stages of implementation and are utilizing either the Structured Decision Making (SDM) or the Comprehensive Assessment Tool (CAT) to assess safety, risk and needs. Amador, Colusa, Contra Costa, Glenn, Imperial, Mariposa, Napa, San Bernardino, Santa Clara, San Mateo, Sonoma, and Stanislaus Counties are implementing CAT; the remaining the counties are using SDM. The final group of counties implemented these tools during Spring 2007 (Sierra, Mono, Calaveras, San Joaquin and Tulare Counties).

- Permanency and Youth Transition is the third area of focus. During State Fiscal Year 2004-2005 (July 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005), pilot counties participated with the State in workgroups to develop protocols and strategies to improve stability and permanency for children and youth in foster care. Workgroups identified the following key strategies for use in this improvement area:
 - Team Decision Making (TDM) – a process based on the belief that a child's well being is best served when the family, community and child welfare agency collaborate to make decisions about the child's placement.
 - Family Participation in Case Planning – a case planning process that actively engages families in defining their strengths and identifying resources that will address the problems which resulted in the disruption of their family.
 - Youth Inclusion in Case Planning – a case planning approach where social workers involve youth in addressing issues related to permanency and transition to adulthood at each interaction with them, focusing on establishing reunification, adoption, guardianship or other permanent life long connection with a trusted, caring adult.

The Youth and Permanency Protocols are intended to strengthen and ensure success of the case plan, and improve outcomes for children and youth.

Court Improvement Program

The Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children and the Courts, Court Improvement Project (CIP) is a federally funded grant program for the improvement of juvenile dependency court systems. In 1997, CIP conducted an assessment of the juvenile courts resulting in 27 specific recommendations. During State Fiscal Year 2003-2005 (July 1, 2003 – June 30, 2005), the CIP Reassessment found progress in key areas, including the representation of children, the experience of judicial officers, and the numerous support and technical assistance programs now available to the courts. The 2005 reassessment is the most comprehensive look at juvenile dependency court proceedings to date. To gather information for the reassessment, statewide surveys were conducted of judicial officers, court executives and attorneys; and, focus groups and interviews were held with key stakeholders including caregivers, parents, youth and social services. Key needs for the court were identified around ensuring timeliness of hearings, participation of parents and children in hearings, and access to meaningful data on the court process. The CIP team is actively working with CDSS to help implement the Reassessment recommendations.

Family to Family

The Family to Family (F2F) Initiative, developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, applies four basic principles: a child's safety is paramount; children belong in families; families need strong communities; and, public child welfare systems need partnerships with community and other systems to achieve positive outcomes for children. The following four core strategies are considered integral to the initiative:

- **Building Community Partnerships:** building relationships with a wide range of community organizations and leaders in neighborhoods where child protection referral rates are high and collaborating to create an environment that supports families involved with the child welfare system.
- **Team Decision Making:** involves foster parents, social workers, birth families and community members in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for children and the adults who care for them.
- **Resource Family Recruitment, Development, and Support:** finding and maintaining foster and kinship homes that can support children and families in their own neighborhoods.
- **Self-Evaluation:** teams of analysts, data managers, frontline managers and staff, and community partners collect, analyze, and interpret data about key Family to Family outcomes to assess whether progress is being made and to determine how policy and practice needs to be changed to bring about further improvement.

Each strategy represents good practice on its own, but it is the joint and mutually reinforcing effects of the four strategies that produce the strongest impact. Implemented together, these strategies provide a focus for practice changes that seek to achieve the outcomes emphasized in Family to Family.

Twenty-five California counties are in various stages of implementing Family to Family; Santa Cruz is the newest county to start implementation (2006), and is still in a planning process that may take up to two years. While all counties tailor their individual strategy of implementation to best fit their administrative needs and fiscal limitations, twenty-four of the counties have implemented Team Decision Making. The following includes the four regions of counties and their start-up dates:

- Central/Coastal: Fresno (2003), Kern (2005), San Luis Obispo (2001), Santa Barbara (2001), Stanislaus (2001), and Ventura (2003).
- Northern: Glenn (2004), Humboldt (2004), Placer (2004), Sacramento (2004), Solano (2005), Tehama (2004), and Trinity (2004).
- Bay Area: Alameda (2003), Contra Costa (2001), Monterey (2003), San Francisco (2001), San Mateo (2001), Santa Clara and Santa Cruz (2006).
- Southern: Los Angeles (1996), Orange (2003), Riverside (2004), San Bernardino (2003), and San Diego (2004).

Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) Projects

The JRTA Title IV-E Site Visits and Technical Assistance project is designed to improve the lives of foster children and their families by focusing on child safety, legal permanency, and child and family well-being when conducting juvenile court case file reviews and courtroom observations for compliance with State and federal laws. The JRTA project was created in response to a 1992 eligibility audit of foster care cases by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Inspector General. The JRTA project team educates judicial officers, court staff, attorneys, social workers, and probation officers to improve compliance with Title IV-E. The JRTA project consultants (experienced juvenile court attorneys) visit local juvenile courts, review court files, observe courtroom proceedings, and provide written reports and memoranda as well as technical assistance and training to assist with the implementation of their recommendations.

The Permanency Project provides judicial education and technical assistance statewide on expanding approaches to permanency for children and their families in the dependency and delinquency systems. The workshops are collaborative in nature. In coordination with the presiding juvenile court judge, local court and county participants are invited to shape the agenda and share in the presentation. Presenters have included judicial officers, foster care youth, social workers, probation officers, mediators, attorneys, and Court Appointed Special Advocates. The purpose of these workshops is to share information on local and national permanency programs and to allow participants to learn and strategize about the development, utilization, and strengthening of these

programs. Topics covered include: roles of each participant in permanency planning; objectives; relative assessments; initial hearings—reasonable efforts, services, visitation; case plan development; finding relatives and connections for youth; concurrent planning; engaging youth in decision-making and expanding mediation.

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program

The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program (KinGAP) is a permanency option for children in long-term foster care placement with relative caregivers. The program became effective on January 1, 2000.

This program provides kin caregivers who are unable or unwilling to adopt the relative child(ren) placed in their care as foster children with a cash benefit supported option for exiting the child welfare system via legal guardianship. Relatives who have had placement of a relative foster child for the previous 12 months prior to taking legal guardianship of that child are eligible for participation. KinGAP was implemented in 1998 and provided a payment rate to participants equal to 100 percent of the basic foster care rate. In 2006, legislation enhanced the benefits paid to eligible participants and expanded applicability to probation youth who lived with a relative at least 12 consecutive months and guardianship established with the relative. Enhanced program benefits include provision of the annual state clothing allowance, Specialized Care Increments (SCI) payments if the child was receiving an SCI payment while in foster care and any county clothing allowance the child would have received while in foster care.

Kinship Support Services Program

California's Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) was authorized by Assembly Bill 1193 (Chapter 794, Statutes of 1997); program requirements are contained in Welfare and Institutions Code section 16605. Initial funding of \$1.5 million was available to counties that had 40 percent or more of their foster children placed with relatives. The program is a grants-in-aid program providing startup and expansion funds for local kinship support services programs that provide community-based family support services to relative caregivers and the dependent children placed in their homes by the juvenile court or who are at risk of dependency or delinquency.

In 2006, the 40 percent relative placement criteria was eliminated to allow statewide expansion of the program, and an additional \$4 million was appropriated for the program.

The KSSP program began in 1998 with the following counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Monterey, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Stanislaus. In State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007), San Luis Obispo, Sonoma, and Ventura were added to the initial eleven counties. In State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008), El Dorado, Kern, Napa, Placer, and Sacramento started a local program, for a current total of nineteen counties with KSSP programs.

During State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 eight counties (Fresno, Glenn, Marin, Merced, Orange, Santa Cruz, Siskiyou, and Solano) began planning activities in anticipation of operating a local KSSP in State Fiscal Year 2008-2009 (July 1, 2008 –June 30, 2009). Eight counties (Del Norte, Humboldt, Imperial, San Joaquin, Santa Barbara, Shasta, Tehama, and Trinity) are receiving technical assistance in exploration of program feasibility and potential participation in State Fiscal Year 2008-2009. KSSP funds can be used to provide support services including, but not limited to, the following:

- Assessment and case management.
- Social services referral and intervention aimed at maintaining the kinship family unit (e.g., housing, homemaker services, legal services, day care, respite care, support groups).
- Transportation for educational, recreational activities, and medical care.
- Information and referral services.
- Individual and group counseling in the area of parent-child relationships and group conflict.
- Counseling and referral services aimed at promoting permanency, including kinship adoption and guardianship.
- Tutoring and mentoring.

Linkages

The Linkage project, funded through a federal grant, aims to increase collaboration between CalWORKs and child welfare. It is being implemented in thirty-three counties in California and provides for coordinated, comprehensive, individualized services to families to support them in achieving the linked goals of self-sufficiency and safety for their children when being served by child welfare and CalWORKs (TANF). Linkages require counties to develop protocols that enhance communication and case coordination between social workers in these two major programs to improve outcomes for at-risk children and families. In addition to struggling with poverty and the possible or actual removal of their children, parents who are in both systems face the complexity of negotiating two bureaucratic systems that have conflicting requirements, goals, and timeframes. The intent of Linkages is to facilitate integration of the two systems to achieve a seamless experience and improved outcomes for families.

Linkages builds on a previous project funded by the Stuart Foundation to serve families receiving family maintenance services through the child welfare agency and also participating in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Under the federal grant received in 2006, many counties are expanding Linkages to serve families receiving CalWORKs and receiving family reunification services through the child welfare agency. Some counties are expanding to serve CalWORKs families that have had a child welfare referral but a case not opened, however, the family was referred to a community based program providing Differential Response case management services. Participating counties receive training, technical support, peer-support, and an extensive toolbox of resources.

Statewide Interagency Team (SIT)

The SIT, which came into existence in 2003, is chaired by CDSS and is comprised of representatives from Department of Health Services, Department of Mental Health, Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Department of Developmental Services. In addition to those agencies, the Department of Education, Employment Development Department, First 5 Commission, Workforce Investment Board, Judicial Council/Administrative Office of the Courts, and the Office of the Chancellor for Community Colleges participate. The purpose of the SIT is to provide leadership and guidance to facilitate implementation of improved systems benefiting the common population of children, youth and families served by SIT agencies. The SIT promotes shared responsibility and accountability for the welfare of children, youth and families by promoting the alignment of planning, funding and policy across state departments.

Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project (CAP)

The CAP is a federal waiver demonstration project that provides participating counties with flexibility in their use of federal and state foster care maintenance and administrative funds that were previously restricted to payment for the care and supervision of children in out-of-home placements and administrative expenditures. Under the CAP, counties will receive a capped allocation of their Title IV-E funds to provide direct services to children and families without regard to their federal eligibility or placement in out-of-home care. This flexible funding waiver demonstration project will support practice, program, and system improvements for early intervention, reunification efforts, and reduction in out-of-home placements. Foster care savings that occur as a result of the demonstration project will be reinvested by the counties in child welfare services program improvements. These foster care savings will support the counties in developing a broader and responsive service array to improved outcomes for children and families. Los Angeles and Alameda Counties are participating in the CAP and implementation began July 1, 2007.

Wraparound

Wraparound was established in California in 1997 as a pilot under Senate Bill 163 (Chapter 795, Statutes of 1997) and allowed California counties (at their option) to use State and county Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)-Foster Care funding to support Wraparound services, instead of out-of-home placement of youth into high-level group homes. The intent was to offer Wraparound services as an alternative to group home care and return children and youth (ages 6 and older) to their homes and communities or to help children at imminent risk of group home placement to remain in their homes. The State and county AFDC – Foster Care funding created a flexible funding resource in addition to other funding sources to support the child and family goals. California's Wraparound serves children and youth from the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health system.

Wraparound is a collaborative team planning process that addresses the barriers to effective treatment and support for a family with a child who has complex and enduring needs. Families and youth are engaged, along with other stakeholders, to identify their own needs and create methods to meet those needs. A plan is created to coordinate responses in all life domains (including safety and crisis), resulting in intensive, individualized services and supports that are provided to families to meet identified needs. Wraparound is:

- Family-centered and youth guided (voice and choice preferences)
- Culturally competent
- Strengths and community based
- Creative and individualized
- Mobilizes natural and community supports to meet unique needs

In 2002, the pilot status was lifted as additional counties began to develop Wraparound as part of their service array. Effective January, 1, 2005, the Mental Health Services Act included a very specific requirement that all counties must develop a Wraparound Program for children and their families unless specified conditions are met. In California, Wraparound has grown from one county in 1997 to thirty-five counties in 2007.

STATE DATA PROFILE



California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

CHILD PROFILE	SAFETY	Fiscal Year 2005ab						Fiscal Year 2006ab						12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007					
		Reports	%	Duplic. ² Childn.	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. ² Childn.	%	Unique Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. ² Childn.	%	Unique Childn. ²	%
I. Total Reports Disposed ¹	CAN	228,012		434,589		356,507		225,911		427,122		351,700		226,132		427,766		354,003	
II. Disposition of CAN Reports ³																			
Substantiated & Indicated		54,250	23.8	95,314	21.9	86,725	24.3	51,617	22.8	89,500	21.0	82,210	23.4	50,393	22.3	87,719	20.5	80,823	22.8
Unsubstantiated		173,752	76.2	281,281	64.7	225,342	63.2	174,283	77.1	277,645	65.0	223,794	63.6	175,725	77.7	278,417	65.1	225,862	63.8
Other		10	0	57,994	13.3	44,440	12.5	11	0	59,977	14	45,696	13	14	0.0	61,630	14.4	47,318	13.4
III. Child Cases Opened for Services ⁴				70,686	74.2	63,939	73.7			68,574	76.6	62,737	76.3			67,201	76.6	61,672	76.3
IV. Children Entering Care Based on CAN Report ⁵				39,482	41.4	33,983	39.2			37,944	42.4	33,213	40.4			36,233	41.3	31,883	39.4
V. Child Fatalities ⁶																		A	
STATEWIDE AGGREGATE DATA USED TO DETERMINE SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY																			
VI. Absence of Maltreatment Recurrence ⁷ [Standard: 94.6% or more]						40,593 of 44,306	91.6					38,567 of 41,654	92.6					39,567 of 42,717	92.6
VII. Absence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care ⁸ (12 months) [standard 99.68% or more]						120,188 of 120,720	99.56					118,063 of 118,568	99.57					117,293 of 117,891	99.49

The Permanency Data for the 12-month period ending March 31, 2007 was based on the annual file created on 7/6/2007.

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

Additional Safety Measures For Information Only (no standards are associated with these):

	Fiscal Year 2005 ^a b	Fiscal Year 2006 ^a b	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007
	Hours	Unique Childn. ^c %	Hours Unique Childn. ^c %
VIII. Median Time to Investigation in Hours (Child File) ⁹	>96 but<120		
IX . Mean Time to Investigation in Hours (Child File) ¹⁰	160		
X. Mean Time to Investigation in Hours (Agency File) ¹¹			
XI. Children Maltreated by Parents While in Foster Care. ¹²			

CFSR Round One Safety Measures to Determine Substantial Conformity (Used primarily by States completing Round One Program Improvement Plans, but States may also review them to compare to prior performance)

	Fiscal Year 2005ab				Fiscal Year 2006ab				12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007					
	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Reports	%	Duplic. Childn. ²	%	Unique Childn. ²	%
XII. Recurrence of Maltreatment ¹³ [Standard: 6.1% or less]													3,150 of 42,717	7.4
XIII. Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care ¹⁴ (9 months) [standard 0.57% or less]													448 of 108,154	0.41

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

NCANDS data completeness information for the CFSR

Description of Data Tests

	Fiscal Year 2005ab	Fiscal Year 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007
Percent of duplicate victims in the submission [At least 1% of victims should be associated with multiple reports (same CHID). If not, the State would appear to have frequently entered different IDs for the same victim. This affects maltreatment recurrence]	8.70	7.90	7.70
Percent of victims with perpetrator reported [File must have at least 75% to reasonably calculate maltreatment in foster care]	88.60	88.80	88.50
Percent of perpetrators with relationship to victim reported [File must have at least 75%]	99.10	99.20	99.60
Percent of records with investigation start date reported [Needed to compute mean and median time to investigation]	80.70	80.90	81.10
Average time to investigation in the Agency file [PART measure]	Not reported	Not reported	N/A
Percent of records with AFCARS ID reported in the Child File [Needed to calculate maltreatment in foster care by the parents; also, all Child File records should now have an AFCARS ID to allow ACF to link the NCANDS data with AFCARS. This is now an all-purpose unique child identifier and a child does not have to be in foster care to have this ID]	100, but no matches found	100, but no matches found	100

FOOTNOTES TO DATA ELEMENTS IN CHILD SAFETY PROFILE

Each maltreatment allegation reported to NCANDS is associated with a disposition or finding that is used to derive the counts provided in this safety profile. The safety profile uses three categories. The various terms that are used in NCANDS reporting have been collapsed into these three groups.

Disposition Category	Safety Profile Disposition (Substantiated or Indicated Maltreatment Victim)	NCANDS Maltreatment Level Codes Included
A	Substantiated or Indicated (Maltreatment Victim)	“Substantiated,” “Indicated,” and “Alternative Response Disposition Victim”
B	Unsubstantiated	“Unsubstantiated” and “Unsubstantiated Due to Intentionally False Reporting”
C	Other	“Closed-No Finding,” “Alternative Response Disposition – Not a Victim,” “Other,” “No Alleged Maltreatment,” and “Unknown or Missing”

Alternative Response was added starting with the 2000 data year. The two categories of Unsubstantiated were added starting with the 2000 data year. In earlier years there was only the category of Unsubstantiated. The disposition of “No alleged maltreatment” was added for FY 2003. It primarily refers to children who receive an investigation or assessment because there is an allegation concerning a sibling or other child in the household, but not themselves, AND whom are not found to be a victim of maltreatment. It applies as a Maltreatment Disposition Level but not as a Report Disposition code because the Report Disposition cannot have this value (there must have been a child who was found to be one of the other values.)

Starting with FFY 2003, the data year is the fiscal year.

Starting with FFY 2004, the maltreatment levels for each child are used consistently to categorize children. While report dispositions are based on the field of report disposition in NCANDS, the dispositions for duplicate children and unique children are based on the maltreatment levels associated with each child. A child victim has at least one maltreatment level that is coded “substantiated,” “indicated,” or “alternative response victim.” A child classified as unsubstantiated has no maltreatment levels that are considered to be victim levels and at least one maltreatment level that is coded “unsubstantiated” or “unsubstantiated due to intentionally false reporting.” A child classified as “other” has no maltreatment levels that are considered to be victim levels and none that are considered to be unsubstantiated levels. If a child has no maltreatments in the record, and report has a victim disposition, the child is assigned to “other” disposition. If a child has no maltreatments in the record and the report has either an unsubstantiated disposition or an “other” disposition, the child is counted as having the same disposition as the report disposition.

1. The data element, “Total CA/N Reports Disposed,” is based on the reports received in the State that received a disposition in the reporting period under review. The number shown may include reports received during a previous year that received a disposition in the reporting year. Counts based on “reports,” “duplicated counts of children,” and “unique counts of children” are provided.
2. The duplicated count of children (report-child pairs) counts a child each time that (s)he was reported. The unique count of children counts a child only once during the reporting period, regardless of how many times the child was reported.
3. For the column labeled “Reports,” the data element, “Disposition of CA/N Reports,” is based on upon the highest disposition of any child who was the subject of an investigation in a particular report. For example, if a report investigated two children, and one child is found to be neglected and the other child found not to be maltreated, the report disposition will be substantiated (Group A). The disposition for each child is based on the specific finding related to the maltreatment(s). In other words, of the two children above, one is a victim and is counted under “substantiated” (Group A) and the other is not a victim and is counted under “unsubstantiated” (Group B). In determining the unique counts of children, the highest finding is given priority. If a child is found to be a victim in one report (Group A), but not a victim in a second report (Group B), the unique count of children includes the child only as a victim (Group A). The category of “other” (Group C) includes children whose report may have been “closed without a finding,” children for whom the allegation disposition is “unknown,” and other dispositions that a State is unable to code as substantiated, indicated, alternative response victim, or unsubstantiated.

4. The data element, "Child Cases Opened for Services," is based on the number of victims (Group A) during the reporting period under review. "Opened for Services" refers to post-investigative services. The duplicated number counts each time a victim's report is linked to ongoing services; the unique number counts a victim only once regardless of the number of times services are linked to reports of substantiated maltreatment.
5. The data element, "Children Entering Care Based on CA/N Report," is based on the number of victims (Group A) during the reporting period under review. The duplicated number counts each time a victim's report is linked to a foster care removal date. The unique number counts a victim only once regardless of the number of removals that may be reported.
6. The data element "Child Fatalities" counts the number of children reported to NCANDS as having died as a result of child abuse and/or neglect. Depending upon State practice, this number may count only those children for whom a case record has been opened either prior to or after the death, or may include a number of children whose deaths have been investigated as possibly related to child maltreatment. For example, some States include neglected-related deaths such as those caused by motor vehicle or boating accidents, house fires or access to firearms, under certain circumstances. The percentage is based on a count of unique victims of maltreatment for the reporting period.
7. The data element "Absence of Recurrence of Maltreatment" is defined as follows: Of all children who were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment allegation during the first 6 months of the reporting period, what percent were not victims of another substantiated or indicated maltreatment allegation within a 6-month period. This data element is used to determine the State's substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #1.
8. The data element "Absence of Child Abuse/or Neglect in Foster Care" is defined as follows: Of all children in foster care during the reporting period, what percent were not victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by foster parent of facility staff member. This data element is used to determine the State's substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #2. A child is counted as not having been maltreated in foster care if the perpetrator of the maltreatment was not identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff. Counts of children not maltreated in foster care are derived by subtracting NCANDS count of children maltreated by foster care providers from AFCARS count of children placed in foster care. The observation period for this measure is 12 months. The number of children not found to be maltreated in foster care and the percentage of all children in foster care are provided
9. Median Time to Investigation in hours is computed from the Child File records using the Report Date and the Investigation Start Date (currently reported in the Child File in mmddyyyy format). The result is converted to hours by multiplying by 24.

10. Mean Time to investigation in hours is computed from the Child File records using the Report Date and the Investigation Start Date (currently reported in the Child File in mmddyyyy format). The result is converted to hours by multiplying by 24. Zero days difference (both dates are on the same day) is reported as “under 24 hours”, one day difference (investigation date is the next day after report date) is reported as “at least 24 hours, but less than 48 hours”, two days difference is reported as “at least 48 hours, but less than 72 hours”, etc.
11. Average response time in hours between maltreatment report and investigation is available through State NCANDS Agency or SDC File aggregate data. “Response time” is defined as the time from the receipt of a report to the time of the initial investigation or assessment. Note that many States calculate the initial investigation date as the first date of contact with the alleged victim, when this is appropriate, or with another person who can provide information essential to the disposition of the investigation or assessment.
12. The data element, “Children Maltreated by Parents while in Foster Care” is defined as follows: Of all children placed in foster care during the reporting period, what percent were victims of substantiated or indicated maltreatment by parent. This data element requires matching NCANDS and AFCARS records by AFCARS IDs. Only unique NCANDS children with substantiated or indicated maltreatments and perpetrator relationship “Parent” are selected for this match. NCANDS report date must fall within the removal period found in the matching AFCARS record.
13. The data element, “Recurrence of Maltreatment,” is defined as follows: Of all children associated with a “substantiated” or “indicated” finding of maltreatment during the first six months of the reporting period, what percentage had another “substantiated” or “indicated” finding of maltreatment within a 6-month period. The number of victims during the first six-month period and the number of these victims who were recurrent victims within six months are provided. This data element was used to determine the State’s substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #1 for CFSR Round One.
14. The data element, “Incidence of Child Abuse and/or Neglect in Foster Care,” is defined as follows: Of all children who were served in foster care during the reporting period, what percentage were found to be victims of “substantiated” or “indicated” maltreatment. A child is counted as having been maltreated in foster care if the perpetrator of the maltreatment was identified as a foster parent or residential facility staff. Counts of children maltreated in foster care are derived from NCANDS, while counts of children placed in foster care are derived from AFCARS. The observation period for these measures is January-September because this is the reporting period that was jointly addressed by both NCANDS and AFCARS at the time when NCANDS reporting period was a calendar year. The number of children found to be maltreated in foster care and the percentage of all children in foster care are provided. This data element was used to determine the State’s substantial conformity with Safety Outcome #2 for CFSR Round One.

Additional Footnotes

A. Under the auspices of the California State Child Death Review Council, the California Department of Health Service (DHS) produces an estimate of the number of child abuse and neglect (CAN) fatalities on the basis of an annual Reconciliation Audit conducted with county Child Death Review Teams (CDRTs). The Audit uses four statewide data systems (i.e., DHS Vital Statistics Death Records, Department of Justice Homicide Files and Child Abuse Central Index, and the Department of Social Services Child Welfare Services/Case Management System) and the findings from CDRT reviews. Because the Audits for 2003-4 are still in progress, the best estimate on the number of fatal child abuse and neglect deaths available for California is the results from the 2002 Audit. The estimate for 2002 is 140 total CAN fatalities.

B. California tracks the percentage of cases in which face-to-face contact with a child occurs, or is attempted, within the regulatory time frames in those situations when face-to-face contact is determined necessary. For the June through September quarter, 2006, the immediate response compliance rate was 95.6 percent and the ten-day response compliance rate was 91.2 percent.

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE		Federal FY 2005ab		Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007	
		# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
I. Foster Care Population Flow							
Children in foster care on first day of year ¹		80,781		78,536		77,943	
Admissions during year		39,939		40,032		39,948	
Discharges during year		40,794		39,734		37,750	
Children discharging from FC in 7 days or less (These cases are excluded from length of stay calculations in the composite measures)		3,963	9.7% of discharges	3,670	9.2% of discharges	3,752	9.9% of discharges
Children in care on last day of year		79,929		78,837		80,145	
Net change during year		-852		301		2,202	
II. Placement Types for Children in Care							
Pre-Adoptive Homes		2,326	2.9	2,371	3.0	2,338	2.9
Foster Family Homes (Relative)		23,877	29.9	24,051	30.5	25,175	31.4
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)		33,969	42.5	34,434	43.7	36,328	45.3
Group Homes		5,772	7.2	5,682	7.2	6,286	7.8
Institutions		4,254	5.3	4,320	5.5	4,770	6.0
Supervised Independent Living		201	0.3	220	0.3	252	0.3
Runaway		5,042	6.3	4,624	5.9	3,708	4.6
Trial Home Visit		4,488	5.6	3,135	4.0	1,288	1.6
Missing Placement Information		0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent year)		0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
III. Permanency Goals for Children in Care							
Reunification		22,603	28.3	21,954	27.8	22,089	27.6
Live with Other Relatives		5,819	7.3	4,993	6.3	4,652	5.8
Adoption		14,827	18.6	16,261	20.6	16,924	21.1
Long Term Foster Care		13,564	17.0	12,748	16.2	12,310	15.4
Emancipation		1,652	2.1	1,814	2.3	1,998	2.5
Guardianship		9,674	12.1	9,450	12.0	9,355	11.7
Case Plan Goal Not Established		11,790	14.8	11,617	14.7	12,817	16.0
Missing Goal Information		0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

POINT-IN-TIME PERMANENCY PROFILE		Federal FY 2005ab		Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007	
		# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode							
One		24,266	30.4	24,406	31.0	25,481	31.8
Two		19,521	24.4	19,089	24.2	19,288	24.1
Three		12,578	15.7	12,578	16.0	12,528	15.6
Four		7,233	9.0	6,980	8.9	7,077	8.8
Five		4,464	5.6	4,234	5.4	4,236	5.3
Six or more		11,795	14.8	11,486	14.6	11,471	14.3
Missing placement settings		72	0.1	64	0.1	64	0.1
V. Number of Removal Episodes							
One		58,977	73.8	57,856	73.4	58,912	73.5
Two		15,322	19.2	15,484	19.6	15,681	19.6
Three		3,972	5.0	3,951	5.0	4,017	5.0
Four		1,127	1.4	1,066	1.4	1,047	1.3
Five		350	0.4	312	0.4	324	0.4
Six or more		180	0.2	167	0.2	163	0.2
Missing removal episodes		1	0.0	1	0.0	1	0.0
VI. Number of children in care 17 of the most recent 22 months ² (percent based on cases with sufficient information for computation)							
		23,713	55.4	23,222	51.8	24,405	52.0
VII. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care (of children in care on last day of FY)							
		19.8		18.9		18.9	
VIII. Length of Time to Achieve Perm. Goal							
Reunification		23,339	7.7	23,233	7.4	22,525	7.2
Adoption		7,515	31.2	7,240	30.2	7,049	29.7
Guardianship		1,815	22.5	1,717	21.5	1,581	21.6
Other		7,686	27.3	7,135	28.2	6,237	33.1
Missing Discharge Reason (footnote 3, page 16)		436	21.7	406	24.0	352	23.0
Total discharges (excluding those w/ problematic dates)		40,791	14.6	39,731	13.8	37,744	13.8
Dates are problematic (footnote 4, page 16)		3	N/A	3	N/A	6	N/A

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

Statewide Aggregate Data Used in Determining Substantial Conformity: Composites 1 through 4			
	Federal FY 2005ab	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007
IX. Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification [standard: 122.6 or higher]. Scaled Scores for this composite incorporate two components	State Score = 119.8	State Score = 118.6	State Score = 120.1
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	30 of 47	29 of 47	31 of 47
Component A: Timeliness of Reunification The timeliness component is composed of three timeliness individual measures.			
Measure C1 - 1: Exits to reunification in less than 12 months: Of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the year shown, who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, what percent was reunified in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) [national median = 69.9%, 75 th percentile = 75.2%]	68.4%	69.8%	70.5%
Measure C1 - 2: Exits to reunification, median stay: Of all children discharged from foster care (FC) to reunification in the year shown, who had been in FC for 8 days or longer, what was the median length of stay (in months) from the date of the latest removal from home until the date of discharge to reunification? (This includes trial home visit adjustment) [national median = 6.5 months, 25 th Percentile = 5.4 months (lower score is preferable in this measure) ^B]	Median = 6.4 months	Median = 6.6 months	Median = 6.2 months
Measure C1 - 3: Entry cohort reunification in < 12 months: Of all children entering foster care (FC) for the first time in the 6 month period just prior to the year shown, and who remained in FC for 8 days or longer, what percent was discharged from FC to reunification in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home? (Includes trial home visit adjustment) [national median = 39.4%, 75 th Percentile = 48.4%]	36.6%	37.3%	38.0%
Component B: Permanency of Reunification The permanency component has one measure.			
Measure C1 - 4: Re-entries to foster care in less than 12 months: Of all children discharged from foster care (FC) to reunification in the 12-month period prior to the year shown, what percent re-entered FC in less than 12 months from the date of discharge? [national median = 15.0%, 25 th Percentile = 9.9% (lower score is preferable in this measure)]	12.9%	13.9%	14.1%

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

	Federal FY 2005ab	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007
X. Permanency Composite 2: Timeliness of Adoptions [standard: 106.4 or higher]. Scaled Scores for this composite incorporate three components. National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)			
Component A: Timeliness of Adoptions of Children Discharged From Foster Care. There are two individual measures of this component. See below.			
Measure C2 - 1: Exits to adoption in less than 24 months: Of all children who were discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in the year shown, what percent was discharged in less than 24 months from the date of the latest removal from home? [national median = 26.8%, 75 th Percentile = 36.6%]	State Score = 90.8 20 of 47	State Score = 93.3 22 of 47	State Score = 94.6 22 of 47
Measure C2 - 2: Exits to adoption, median length of stay: Of all children who were discharged from foster care (FC) to a finalized adoption in the year shown, what was the median length of stay in FC (in months) from the date of latest removal from home to the date of discharge to adoption? [national median = 32.4 months, 25 th Percentile = 27.3 months(lower score is preferable in this measure)]	State Score = 29.8% Median = 31.2 months	State Score = 30.8% Median = 30.2 months	State Score = 32.6% Median = 29.7 months
Component B: Progress Toward Adoption for Children in Foster Care for 17 Months or Longer. There are two individual measures. See below.			
Measure C2 - 3: Children in care 17+ months, adopted by the end of the year: Of all children in foster care (FC) on the first day of the year shown who were in FC for 17 continuous months or longer (and who, by the last day of the year shown, were not discharged from FC with a discharge reason of live with relative, reunify, or guardianship), what percent was discharged from FC to a finalized adoption by the last day of the year shown? [national median = 20.2%, 75 th Percentile = 22.7%]	14.0%	14.1%	14.0%
Measure C2 - 4: Children in care 17+ months achieving legal freedom within 6 months: Of all children in foster care (FC) on the first day of the year shown who were in FC for 17 continuous months or longer, and were not legally free for adoption prior to that day, what percent became legally free for adoption during the first 6 months of the year shown? Legally free means that there was a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father. This calculation excludes children who, by the end of the first 6 months of the year shown had discharged from FC to "reunification," "live with relative," or "guardianship." [national median = 8.8%, 75 th Percentile = 10.9%]	5.2%	4.8%	5.6%
Component C: Progress Toward Adoption of Children Who Are Legally Free for Adoption. There is one measure for this component. See below.			
Measure C2 - 5: Legally free children adopted in less than 12 months: Of all children who became legally free for adoption in the 12 month period prior to the year shown (i.e., there was a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father), what percent was discharged from foster care to a finalized adoption in less than 12 months of becoming legally free? [national median = 45.8%, 75 th Percentile = 53.7%]	55.5%	55.9%	53.5%

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

	Federal FY 2005ab	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007
XI. Permanency Composite 3: Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time [standard: 121.7 or higher]. Scaled Scores for this composite incorporate two components	State Score = 105.1	State Score = 105.9	State Score = 106.2
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	15 of 51	15 of 51	16 of 51
Component A: Achieving permanency for Children in Foster Care for Long Periods of Time. This component has two measures.			
Measure C3 - 1: Exits to permanency prior to 18th birthday for children in care for 24 + months. Of all children in foster care for 24 months or longer on the first day of the year shown, what percent was discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday and by the end of the fiscal year? A permanent home is defined as having a discharge reason of adoption, guardianship, or reunification (including living with relative). [national median 25.0%, 75 th Percentile = 29.1%]	17.7%	17.5%	16.7%
Measure C3 - 2: Exits to permanency for children with TPR: Of all children who were discharged from foster care in the year shown, and who were legally free for adoption at the time of discharge (i.e., there was a parental rights termination date reported to AFCARS for both mother and father), what percent was discharged to a permanent home prior to their 18th birthday? A permanent home is defined as having a discharge reason of adoption, guardianship, or reunification (including living with relative) [national median 96.8%, 75 th Percentile = 98.0%]	97.8%	97.5%	97.8%
Component B: Growing up in foster care. This component has one measure.			
Measure C3 - 3: Children Emancipated Who Were in Foster Care for 3 Years or More. Of all children who, during the year shown, either (1) were discharged from foster care prior to age 18 with a discharge reason of emancipation, or (2) reached their 18 th birthday while in foster care, what percent were in foster care for 3 years or longer? [national median 47.8%, 25 th Percentile = 37.5% (lower score is preferable)]	53.8%	52.4%	51.1%

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

	Federal FY 2005ab	Federal FY 2006ab	12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007
XII. Permanency Composite 4: Placement Stability [national standard: 101.5 or higher]. Scaled score for this composite incorporates no components but three individual measures (below)	State Score = 92.5	State Score = 91.8	State Score = 92.2
National Ranking of State Composite Scores (see footnote A on page 12 for details)	22 of 51	20 of 51	21 of 51
Measure C4 - 1) Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for less than 12 months. Of all children served in foster care (FC) during the 12 month target period who were in FC for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings? [national median = 83.3%, 75 th Percentile = 86.0%]	81.2%	80.4%	80.8%
Measure C4 - 2) Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 12 to 24 months. Of all children served in foster care (FC) during the 12 month target period who were in FC for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings? [national median = 59.9%, 75 th Percentile = 65.4%]	59.0%	60.1%	60.2%
Measure C4 - 3) Two or fewer placement settings for children in care for 24+ months. Of all children served in foster care (FC) during the 12 month target period who were in FC for at least 24 months, what percent had two or fewer placement settings? [national median = 33.9%, 75 th Percentile = 41.8%]	35.2%	33.8%	34.0%

Special Footnotes for Composite Measures:

- A. These National Rankings show your State's performance on the Composites compared to the performance of all the other States that were included in the 2004 data. The 2004 data were used for establishing the rankings because that is the year used in calculating the National Standards.
- B. In most cases, a high score is preferable on the individual measures. In these cases, you will see the 75th percentile listed to indicate that this would be considered a good score. However, in a few instances, a low score is good (shows desirable performance), such as re-entry to foster care. In these cases, the 25th percentile is displayed because that is the target direction for which States will want to strive. Of course, in actual calculation of the total composite scores, these "lower are preferable" scores on the individual measures are reversed so that they can be combined with all the individual scores that are scored in a positive direction, where higher scores are preferable.

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

PERMANENCY PROFILE FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP		Federal FY 2005ab		Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007	
I. Number of children entering care for the first time in cohort group (% = 1 st time entry of all entering within first 6 months)		# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
15,395			78.2	15,436	77.6	15,782	76.8
II. Most Recent Placement Types							
Pre-Adoptive Homes		76	0.5	87	0.6	69	0.4
Foster Family Homes (Relative)		4,110	26.7	4,388	28.4	4,554	28.9
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)		6,352	41.3	6,563	42.5	7,160	45.4
Group Homes		789	5.1	753	4.9	851	5.4
Institutions		1,266	8.2	1,175	7.6	1,294	8.2
Supervised Independent Living		14	0.1	23	0.1	22	0.1
Runaway		764	5.0	703	4.6	527	3.3
Trial Home Visit		2,024	13.1	1,744	11.3	1,305	8.3
Missing Placement Information		0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not Applicable (Placement in subsequent yr)		0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
III. Most Recent Permanency Goal							
Reunification		7,997	51.9	8,053	52.2	8,242	52.2
Live with Other Relatives		86	0.6	86	0.6	66	0.4
Adoption		1,380	9.0	1,615	10.5	1,458	9.2
Long-Term Foster Care		209	1.4	191	1.2	180	1.1
Emancipation		57	0.4	67	0.4	63	0.4
Guardianship		267	1.7	248	1.6	273	1.7
Case Plan Goal Not Established		5,399	35.1	5,176	33.5	5,500	34.8
Missing Goal Information		0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
IV. Number of Placement Settings in Current Episode							
One		7,860	51.1	7,570	49.0	7,909	50.1
Two		4,278	27.8	4,347	28.2	4,501	28.5
Three		2,064	13.4	2,295	14.9	2,196	13.9
Four		700	4.5	695	4.5	758	4.8
Five		248	1.6	254	1.6	234	1.5
Six or more		189	1.2	237	1.5	148	0.9
Missing placement settings		56	0.4	38	0.2	36	0.2

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

PERMANENCY PROFILE FIRST-TIME ENTRY COHORT GROUP (continued)	Federal FY 2005ab		Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
V. Reason for Discharge						
Reunification/Relative Placement	5,266	88.4	5,396	90.0	5,485	92.7
Adoption	63	1.1	51	0.9	45	0.8
Guardianship	51	0.9	67	1.1	77	1.3
Other	544	9.1	439	7.3	286	4.8
Unknown (missing discharge reason or N/A)	31	0.5	44	0.7	26	0.4
	Number of Months		Number of Months		Number of Months	
VI. Median Length of Stay in Foster Care	13.5		8.1		not yet determinable	

ACFARS Data Completeness and Quality Information (2% or more is a warning sign):						
	Federal FY 2005ab			Federal FY 2006ab		
	N	As a % of Exits Reported	N	As a % of Exits Reported	N	As a % of Exits Reported
File contains children who appear to have been in care less than 24 hours	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %
File contains children who appear to have exited before they entered	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	2	0.0 %
Missing dates of latest removal	3	0.0 %	3	0.0 %	4	0.0 %
File contains "Dropped Cases" between report periods with no indication as to discharge	820	2.0 %	767	1.9 %	705	1.9 %
Missing discharge reasons	436	1.1 %	406	1.0 %	352	0.9 %
File submitted lacks data on Termination of Parental Rights for finalized adoptions	135	1.8 %	96	1.3 %	108	1.5 %
Foster Care file has different count than Adoption File of (public agency) adoptions (N= adoption count disparity).	23	0.3% fewer in the updated (unofficial) adoption file.	302	4.2% fewer in the updated (unofficial) adoption file.	N/A	There is no rolling year adoption file.
File submitted lacks count of number of placement settings in episode for each child	N	Percent of cases in file	N	Percent of cases in file	N	Percent of cases in file
	72	0.1 %	64	0.1 %	64	0.1 %

California Child and Family Services Review Data Profile: August 29, 2007

Note: These are CFSR Round One permanency measures. They are intended to be used primarily by States completing Round One Program Improvement Plans, but could also be useful to States in CFSR Round Two in comparing their current performance to that of prior years:

	Federal FY 2005ab		Federal FY 2006ab		12-Month Period Ending 03/31/2007	
	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children	# of Children	% of Children
IX. Of all children who were reunified with their parents or caretakers at the time of discharge from foster care, what percentage was reunified in less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal for home? (4.1) [Standard: 76.2% or more]	14,635	62.7	15,308	65.9	14,996	66.6
X. Of all children who exited care to a finalized adoption, what percentage exited care in less than 24 months from the time of the latest removal from home? (5.1) [Standard: 32.0% or more]	2,237	29.8	2,227	30.8	2,293	32.5
XI. Of all children served who have been in foster care less than 12 months from the time of the latest removal from home, what percentage have had no more than two placement settings? (6.1) [Standard: 86.7% or more]	37,704	82.7	37,758	82.0	37,739	82.4
XII. Of all children who entered care during the year, what percentage re-entered foster care within 12 months of a prior foster care episode? (4.2) [Standard: 8.6% or less]	3,568	8.9 (78.3% new entry)	3,891	9.7 (77.2% new entry)	3,749	9.4 (77.9% new entry)

FOOTNOTES TO DATA ELEMENTS IN THE PERMANENCY PROFILE

¹The FY 05, FY 06 , and 07 counts of children in care at the start of the year exclude 999 , 1052 , and 976 children, respectively. They were excluded to avoid counting them twice. That is, although they were actually in care on the first day, they also qualify as new entries because they left and re-entered again at some point during the same reporting period. To avoid counting them as both “in care on the first day” and “entries,” the Children’s Bureau selects only the most recent record. That means they get counted as “entries,” not “in care on the first day.”

²We designated the indicator, 17 of the most recent 22 months, rather than the statutory time frame for initiating termination of parental rights proceedings at 15 of the most 22 months, since the AFCARS system cannot determine the date the child is considered to have entered foster care as defined in the regulation. We used the outside date for determining the date the child is considered to have entered foster care, which is 60 days from the actual removal date.

³This count only includes case records missing a discharge reason, but which have calculable lengths of stay. Records missing a discharge reason and with non-calculable lengths of stay are included in the cell “Dates are Problematic”.

⁴The dates of removal and exit needed to calculate length of stay are problematic. Such problems include: 1) missing data, 2) faulty data (chronologically impossible), 3) a child was in care less than 1 day (length of stay = 0) so the child should not have been reported in foster care file, or 4) child’s length of stay would equal 21 years or more. These cases are marked N/A = Not Applicable because no length of stay can legitimately be calculated.

⁵This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay was 13.5 in FY 05. This includes 0 children who entered and exited on the same day (who had a zero length of stay). Therefore, the median length of stay was unaffected by any ‘same day’ children.

⁶This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay was 8.1 in FY 06. This includes 0 children who entered and exited on the same day (who had a zero length of stay). Therefore, the median length of stay was unaffected by any ‘same day’ children.

⁷This First-Time Entry Cohort median length of stay is Not Yet Determinable for 07. This includes 0 children who entered and exited on the same day (they had a zero length of stay). Therefore, the median length of stay would still be Not Yet Determinable, but would be unaffected by any ‘same day’ children. The designation, Not Yet Determinable occurs when a true length of stay for the cohort cannot be calculated because fewer than 50% of the children have exited.

NARRATIVE ASSESSMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES



Narrative Assessment of Child and Family Outcomes

As a result of the first Child and Family Services Review California entered into a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The original PIP had 141 action steps and over 2900 tasks to be completed by June 30, 2005. As of June 30, 2005 the State successfully completed all PIP action steps and tasks; final data submissions were completed June 2007. As of August 2007, the State received confirmation from the Administration for Children and Families that it has passed 12 of the 14 measures.

A. SAFETY ---

Safety Outcome 1:

Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

California did not achieve substantial conformity on Safety Outcome 1 during the first Child and Family Services Review (CFSR); although timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment was rated a strength, the State did not meet the national standards for the percentage of children experiencing more than one substantiated or indicated child maltreatment report within a six-month period and the percentage of children maltreated while in foster care.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies included:

- Implementation of differential response in the Eleven Pilot County Project.
- Implementation of a Standardized Safety Assessment System in all 58 counties and used throughout the life of a case to determine safety, risk and needs.
- Modified State legislation effective January 1, 2005 to allow family maintenance services to be continued beyond the 12 month period and extended in six month intervals if it can be shown that the objectives of the service plan can be achieved within the extended periods and if the extended services can be provided within the county's child welfare allocation.
- Collaborated with other State departments to ensure that children and families in the child welfare system receive the appropriate priority for Proposition 36 mental health services funding, and implementing the C-CFSR county self-assessment and planning process to identify and remove systemic barriers identified by counties.
- The CDSS provided technical assistance and worked closely with high priority counties to identify challenges.
- The CDSS worked with counties to determine where additional support services may be needed for caregivers and identify resources that can provide support services for caregivers in counties.

ITEM 1:

Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment. How effective is the agency in responding to incoming reports of child maltreatment in a timely manner?

POLICY

The California Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP) Division 31 sets forth regulations for the handling of all suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect, from the emergency response stage to the closure of a case via family reunification or other permanency options. The MPP Sections 31-101, 31-105, 31-110, 31-115 and 31-120; Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16504(a) mandate the requirements and timeframes for initiations of an investigation abuse or neglect. All County Information Notice (ACIN 1-86-06) identifies timeframes for investigations per the MPP sections above. If the referral is identified as requiring a 10-day response, the investigation must have been attempted or completed by the end of the tenth day after the referral is received (the day the referral is received is counted as day one). Additionally, if a referral is identified as requiring an immediate response, the response must be initiated or completed by midnight of the day after the referral is received.

Any child reported to the county welfare agency as endangered by abuse, neglect, or exploitation shall be eligible for initial intake and evaluation of risk services. Each county welfare agency shall maintain and operate a 24-hour response system. An in-person response is not required when the county welfare agency, based upon an evaluation of risk, determines that an in-person response is not appropriate. An evaluation of risk includes collateral contacts, a review of previous referrals, and other relevant information. The social worker shall respond to a referral by one of the following methods:

- Completing an emergency response assessment to document whether or not an in-person investigation is appropriate.
- Conducting an immediate in-person investigation when a child is alleged to be at immediate risk (the term "immediate" is not defined by the State).
- Conducting an in-person investigation initiated within 10 calendar days from the date the referral is received.

Dispositions to referrals are categorized in the following four ways: inconclusive, substantiated, unfounded, and assessment only. According to the MPP Section 31-002, these terms are defined as follows.

- **INCONCLUSIVE REPORT:** a report which is determined by the investigator who conducted the investigation not to be unfounded, but in which the findings are inconclusive and there is insufficient evidence to determine whether child abuse or neglect has occurred.
- **SUBSTANTIATED REPORT:** a report which is determined by a child protective agency investigator, based upon some credible evidence, to constitute child abuse or neglect.
- **UNFOUNDED REPORT:** a report which is determined by a child protective agency investigator to be false, to be inherently improbable, to involve an accidental injury, or not to constitute child abuse.

- **EMERGENCY RESPONSE ASSESSMENT:** an assessment of an emergency response referral conducted by a social worker skilled in emergency response for the purpose of determining whether an in-person investigation is required.

All referrals from law enforcement agencies that allege abuse, neglect or exploitation result in an in-person investigation.

The decision criteria for whether or not an in-person investigation is necessary must include, but not be limited to consideration of the following factors:

- Ability to locate the child.
- Existence of an open case and whether the problem described in the allegation is being adequately addressed.
- The allegation meets one or more of the definitions of child abuse, exploitation or neglect.
- The allegation includes specific acts and/or behavioral indicators which are suggestive of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

California MPP, Sections 31-101.1, 31-101.3, 31-105 and 31-110 mandate a risk assessment in order to determine the priority of initiating investigations of abuse or neglect as follows:

- Initiating investigations are prioritized by the level or risk assessed by initial emergency response social worker. Based upon the level or risk, the social worker determines whether an immediate response is necessary or if an investigation can occur within 10 days from receiving the referral.
- Current regulation provides the minimal guidelines for emergency response protocol and in-person investigations. Each county may develop their own protocol as long as it contains the required elements.
- All referrals from law enforcement agencies must be investigated.
- No response is required to a cross-report from a law enforcement agency if the law enforcement agency has investigated and determined that there is no indication of abuse or neglect by a member of the child's household.

California MPP Sections 31-105.1, 31-110.3 and 31-320.2 mandate face-to-face contact with the child alleged to have been abused or neglected. Face-to-face contact during the course of an investigation occurs when an emergency response social worker determines that an in-person investigation is necessary. The social worker shall make a face-to-face contact immediately or within 10-days, depending upon the assessed level of safety to the child.

PRACTICE

- Currently, all 58 counties in California utilize either the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool or Comprehensive Assessment (CAT) tool in assessing safety, risk and needs. Dates of implementation of these tools varied across counties, however, by June 30, 2007, all counties had implemented a tool. The use of these tools promotes a uniform practice of assessment which allows agencies to improve response timeliness.

- Initiating investigations are prioritized by the level of risk assessed by the initial emergency response social worker. Based upon the level of risk, the social worker determines whether an immediate response is necessary or if an investigation can occur within 10 days from receiving the referral. Both SDM and CAT tools guide the social worker to determine the appropriate response to the referral.
- In some instances the child welfare agency requests that law enforcement complete a safety check prior to the completion of the 10 day response. For example, a call is received at the hotline indicating current fighting in a home. The caller reports hearing screaming but is unclear as to whether or not children are present. The hotline worker makes a request of the local law enforcement jurisdiction to conduct an immediate “safety/welfare check” and assess the situation for further action.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

One of the state outcome measures contained in the Outcomes and Accountability System is timeliness to investigation. The measure is broken into two parts, one for referrals that are assigned an immediate response and another for referrals that are assigned a 10 day response. The table below shows the improvement in this measure from second quarter 2003 to second quarter 2006.

Response Priority	Quarter	% that meet timeline	% change
Immediate Response	Q2 2003	94.5%	----
Immediate Response	Q2 2006	95.8%	1.4%
10 Day Response	Q2 2003	88.6%	----
10 Day Response	Q2 2006	92.3%	4.1%

The State attributes the improvement to the implementation of the Outcomes and Accountability System and the on-going availability of current data. Data is posted online and is utilized by counties for quality assurance and as a management tool.

In addition, the implementation of the Standardized Safety Assessment System is believed to promote a uniform practice of assessing safety, risk and needs which allows agencies to improve response timeliness. However, it takes time to fully implement either set of tools so that workers are proficient in using them. Because there are a number of counties that implemented the Standardized Safety Assessment System less than one year ago, it is too early to recognize any impact from this in the data. Additionally, many counties have implemented several child welfare improvements in a short period of time, such as SDM or CAT, Differential Response and others, therefore it is difficult to gauge which improvement caused the greatest improvement in the data.

CHALLENGES

- Counties reported social worker turnover continues to be an issue statewide which affects the workload of the remaining social workers as well as their ability to respond to referrals in a timely manner.
- When child abuse referrals are responded to jointly with law enforcement, the logistics involved in arranging the investigation may delay meeting with the child and family (e.g. the availability of law enforcement to respond in a timely manner). There is often a need for increased communication with law enforcement and specific protocols for handling referrals as well.
- Stakeholders, including social workers, reported locating families in order to respond to a referral is often difficult in geographically large counties or densely populated areas. Barriers include traveling great distances in large counties, locating homes in remote areas, new housing developments may not be on maps, and, in urban areas congested traffic.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Differential response, as implemented by the Eleven Pilot Counties, assists families whose referrals were assessed as not meeting the legal definition of child abuse or neglect, by providing services to them based on family strengths and needs. This focus on early intervention and community partnerships strengthen families and reduce the likelihood of future referrals, in turn, decreasing the number of referrals that social workers must respond to, allowing for faster response times.

ITEM 2:**Repeat Maltreatment.**

How effective is the agency in reducing the recurrence of maltreatment of children?

POLICY

The policies for the handling of reports of new incidences of abuse/neglect received on cases currently open for service, including allegations of abuse/neglect in foster care, are the same as all child abuse and neglect referrals. Counties have discretion regarding whether or not the investigation of a new allegation is assigned to the ongoing social worker. An All County Letter (ACL 06-15) issued on August 4, 2006 delineated the requirements and procedures for the investigation of child abuse/neglect allegations regarding probation wards in out-of-home placement. Specifically, when an allegation of suspected child abuse/neglect is made regarding a child in an in-home or in a licensed out-of-home care setting, including a child placed in the home of a relative or non-related extended family member (NREFM), and that child is a probation ward of the court, the referral comes into the child welfare services agency hotline. The hotline worker enters the referral into the automated system (CWS/CMS), assigns it to the probation department for investigation, and probation reports the results of its investigations to the child welfare agency.

All County Letter (ACL 05-09) issued April 26, 2005 clarified required actions when the subject of the report of suspected child abuse or neglect is a child in out-of-home placement including a child placed in the home of a relative or NREFM under the jurisdiction of the county child welfare services agency. The ACL stated “the social worker determines if an immediate response or in-person investigation is necessary, or if referral to another agency is appropriate.” The hotline worker is responsible for determining the type of response to the report. A report of suspected child abuse/neglect of a child in out-of-home care is to be treated in the same manner and urgency as a report on any other child.

Assembly Bill 2795 (Chapter 332, Statutes of 2004) in part extended the timeframe for the provision of family maintenance (FM) services. Effective January 1, 2005, FM services are allowed to be continued past the 12 month period, extended in six month intervals, if it can be shown that the objectives of the service plan can be achieved within the extended time periods and if the extended services can be provided within the county’s child welfare services allocation. No data is available to assess the extent to which counties have availed themselves of extending FM services and whether the additional time has been beneficial for families receiving services.

PRACTICE

- Implementation of the Standardized Safety Assessment process ensures that families are systematically assessed for safety, risk and needs throughout the life of the case. As cases move forward to comprehensive assessment and service planning, services and resources are evaluated for effectiveness in reducing risk and potential for addressing necessary changes in family functioning as follows:
 - assessments are performed prior to completing first face-to-face contact and recorded within 48 hours;
 - risk assessments are required on all substantiated and inconclusive in-person responses within 30 days of first face-to-face contact; and,
 - family strength and needs (including those of the caregiver) are assessed on all open cases (on initial cases, within 30 days of first face-to-face contact and at each six month review).

Decisions on case closure also address whether improvements have been made that assure the ongoing safety of children.

- Case plans developed with families address the specific and unique issues of the children and the parents that contributed to the abuse and neglect and provide for the provision of services to address those issues.
- Social workers conduct monthly visits to assess progress on case plan goals and assess any issues which might affect the safety of the child. This applies for both children who remain in the home and those in out-of-home care.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

According to the State Data Profile, the majority (39,567 or 92.6 percent) of the 42,717 children who were victims of substantiated maltreatment in California during the first 6 months of the 12 month reporting period ending March 31, 2007, were not victims of another substantiated maltreatment allegation within a subsequent six month period. This figure improved during the last three years. In Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005) it was 91.6 percent and in Federal Fiscal Year 2006 (October 1, 2005-September 30, 2006) it was 92.6 percent. This figure has not met the federal standard of 94.6 percent, however, is moving toward compliance. The rate of re-occurrence for substantiated physical and sexual abuse has declined during the same time period as referenced in the above paragraph while the rate of general neglect has remained steady. The fact that general neglect comprises the majority of reports may explain why the overall recurrence figure has not changed dramatically. General neglect may continue in this manner due to the socioeconomic factors that contribute to neglect cases are unlikely to change and families require sufficient resources of various kinds at multiple levels to maintain progress and sustain change.

Highlights from the preliminary evaluation indicate that in the Eleven Pilot Counties, the rate of recurrence of maltreatment within three and six months decreased by 1.6 percentage points, and within 12 months the rate decreased by 1.9 percentage points. In the remaining 47 counties, the decrease was 1.0 percent within three and six months and 0.9 percent within 12 months. The following are examples of the decreases in individual pilot counties:

- 10.8 percent to 7.2 percent (at three months, Glenn County)
- 13.0 percent to 8.9 percent (at six months, Humboldt County)
- 26.6 percent to 17.0 percent (at 12 months San Luis Obispo County)

In Humboldt County, The Incredible Years program offers training in parenting skills. Among children whose parents have completed the program, the rate of recurrence of maltreatment is 5.7 percent, which is 2.6 percentage points lower than the rate for the rest of the county. The State will continue to monitor this practice.

CHALLENGES

- Stakeholders reported insufficient community resources across disciplines is an ongoing issue in most communities. It is believed that this contributes to repeat maltreatment as families may not be receiving the support and services needed to make progress and change behaviors. The insufficient level of resources creates situations of limited access, reduced quantity and quality of services/supports, and lack of availability of aftercare services. For example, limited numbers of trained/experienced providers means that children/parents experience long waiting lists for mental health services; limited aftercare services, especially for substance abuse, does not support parents efforts to maintain sobriety; and, transportation to/from needed services is a barrier especially in rural communities where public transportation is extremely limited. This was a prevalent theme in stakeholder focus groups, at the stakeholder convening, and with the Statewide Assessment Team members.

- Stakeholders reported a lack of culturally appropriate and bi-lingual providers to assist families and this is an issue in many if not all counties. Without culturally appropriate services and supports, there is an increased risk of failure and possible repeat maltreatment.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The Eleven County Pilot, currently being evaluated, is showing promise in reducing the recurrence of maltreatment. Since 2000, the percentage of children who experienced no recurrence of maltreatment has improved slightly statewide. Since 2004, the pilot counties improved by several percentage points, while the non-pilot counties remained nearly constant. The implementation of all three of the strategies: the Standardized Safety Assessment System, Differential Response and the Youth and Permanency Protocols have helped the pilot counties' performance in the outcome indicators. In addition, all of the pilot counties are Family to Family Counties.
- Stakeholders report peer to peer supports provided by parent partner programs are showing promise. One such program in Contra Costa County is a component of a federal System of Care grant the county child welfare service agency is implementing. Although the evaluation is just in the initial stages, preliminary analysis shows that parents participating in the program have a lower recidivism rate than those who do not have the support of a parent partner. For the initial cases involving parent partners, 14.7 percent of the youth have reunified within three months of being removed, compared to 9.6 percent for a matched historical sample.
- Family Engagement meetings which involve family members and community partners lead to case plan goals that are specific to the families' needs. This approach of including parents in the process of identifying strengths, needs, and case plan goals, increases the likelihood that parents will follow through with case plan activities. The expectation is that this will result in significant changes that help to prevent recurrence.
- Child welfare services agencies are increasingly utilizing family resource centers to provide community-based services as local support system to families. Family resource centers offer services that are neighborhood based and closer to where a family lives, therefore more accessible. Currently, there are an estimated 795 family resource centers and family support programs throughout the 58 counties. Specific examples include Sacramento County where the county supported Birth and Beyond program is housed in neighborhood based family resource centers that are in communities with high child protection referrals. In Santa Clara County, the county sponsors four family resource centers. In Stanislaus County, the county partners with neighborhood based family resource centers to improve outreach and engagement of families.
- The Linkages project is being implemented in 33 counties in California and provides for coordinated, comprehensive, individualized services to families to support them in achieving the linked goals of self-sufficiency and safety for their children when being served by child welfare and CalWORKS (TANF). Through protocols designed to enhance communication and case coordination between the child welfare social worker and CalWORKS social worker, these two departments collaborate to improve outcomes for at-risk children and families.

Safety Outcome 2:**Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.**

For the first Child and Family Services Review, California did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2, primarily due to the cases reviewed revealed that assessments failed to address underlying risk-related issues, such as domestic violence or mental illness. There was a lack of follow-up to ensure services were received and the 12-month limit on family maintenance services may not have been sufficient to resolve the issues that contributed to the risk of harm. Although California did not achieve substantial conformity on this Outcome, a finding was the State made diligent efforts to provide services to children in their own homes and to ensure that the risk of harm to children was adequately addressed in a large percentage of the cases. The Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented were the same as those implemented to improve on Safety Outcome 1.

ITEM 3:

Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care. How effective is the agency in providing services, when appropriate to prevent removal from their homes?

POLICY

According to California Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP), Sections 31-101.4, 31-110 and 31-105.115 and Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16504(a), any child reported to the county welfare agency to be endangered by abuse, neglect, or exploitation shall be eligible for initial intake and evaluation of safety and risk. The social worker making any initial response to a request for child welfare services shall consider providing appropriate social services to maintain the child safely in his or her own home. Differential Response is a practice that is utilized by some counties as a way to connect families with services to prevent situations of neglect and abuse that require removal.

California places significant emphasis on the case plan as the “foundation and central unifying tool in child welfare services”. Statutory and regulatory requirements for a written case plan have been in force since 1982. Assembly Bill 2795(Chapter 332, Statutes of 2004) extended the required case plan completion timeframe from 30 to 60 days. Although Assembly Bill 2795 states that the case plan must be completed 60 days from the date of placement, other sections of the bill and federal 45 Code of Regulations Section 1356.21(g) require a case plan be developed no later than 60 days from a child’s removal. The MPP Section 31-206.4 states that the case plan shall be considered complete only if all elements specified in Section 31-206.4 have been documented and the social worker/probation placement officer’s supervisor has signed and dated the case plan. The intent of the Legislature was to allow additional time to fully engage the family in the case plan process, soliciting input from the child, the child’s family as well as input from other interested parties. This approach for improved assessment of safety, risk and needs supports identification of appropriate services. The application of the 60 day case plan extension is left to the discretion of each county. Counties were advised of this change in an All County Letter (ACL 06-07).

PRACTICE

- All 58 counties are implementing Standardized Safety Assessment System to determine appropriate services and supports that address the needs of children and families. The child welfare agency collaborates with community providers to meet family service needs and to maintain the safety of the children.
- The social worker is required to visit each child with an approved case plan who remains in the home, at least once a calendar month. to assess the safety and risk level as well as the family's progress with services. The social worker may be permitted to have less frequent visits, up to a minimum of once every two months, with documented supervisory approval. The social worker's visit(s) including detailed recommendations regarding observations and case plan progress are documented in CWS/CMS.
- Wraparound services, which are now being used in 35 counties (Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Mendocino, Merced, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Orange, Placer, Plumas, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Siskiyou, Solano, Sutter, Tehama, Tulare, and Ventura; Marin has also been recently approved), are designed to support families when children are placed back in the home, often from group home placements, by providing individualized services for the child and family to help transition and stabilize the placement. This process provides services to families when re-entry into foster care might be most likely to occur. The average length of time with Wraparound support is 18 months. The time frame is driven by the needs of the child and family. Crisis and safety planning is integral to the Wraparound process.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The State Data Profile indicates that fewer children have entered care in the last two years. In Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005), 33,983 children entered care and in the 12 month reporting period ending March 31, 2007, 31,883 children entered care reflecting a decline of 2,100. The percentages for that time period indicate of all children discharged from foster care to reunification and who re-enter foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge is 14.1 percent. The figure of 14.1 percent is very close to the national median of 15 percent and yet higher than the 25th percentile of 9.9 percent.

Re-entry into foster care within 12 months of a previous placement episode is an area that has shown no movement over the course of California's PIP despite practice and resource improvements. The configuration of the current system (CWS/CMS) does not allow for the documentation of the transfer of cases whose care and supervision was dismissed from the county child welfare agency and given to the probation agency. The result is an artificial increase of the foster care re-entry rate. The implementation of the new SACWIS (CWS/Web) should rectify this inherent problem. In the mean time, in consultation with Department of Health and Human Services this issue has been addressed through a change to the AFCARS program code to reflect the child's actual experience versus an automated program script that results in incorrect information.

For the Eleven County Pilot, when the re-entry rate (back into foster care within 12 months of reunification) for children who entered care during the period of June 2000 to June 2001 is compared to children who entered care from June 2003 to June 2004, there is a decrease of 2.1 percent from 12.9 percent to 10.8 percent.

CHALLENGES

- While there are services and supports throughout each county, the availability and service array is often limited due to funding resources and lack of staff qualified to provide services that are culturally and linguistically matched to child and parent needs. For example, in communities with growing Spanish speaking populations, there are an insufficient number of bi-lingual mental health service providers as well as other treatment services available.
- Stakeholders, including social workers, estimated that 70-80 percent of child welfare involved families are affected by substance abuse. The length of time required for effective drug and alcohol treatment for parents with significant substance abuse can be a barrier to successfully maintaining children in the home.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Differential Response (Path 2) as it is implemented in the Eleven County Pilot counties, employs an approach whereby families work with representatives of child welfare agencies, other county agencies, and community-based organizations to identify their risks and strengths and to participate in services to improve child and family outcomes. Preliminary data gathered from the Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) indicates at least 1,999 families have been served through Path 1 and 4,615 families in Path 2, providing families with an additional 6,614 contacts with community services. In addition, some counties were able to provide information about re-referral rates that document the success of this strategy. Two counties with independent evaluation systems that tracked re-referral rates found that less than 1% of families that received Path 1 or 2 services were subsequently reported for additional incidences of suspected abuse or neglect.
- Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) is being used by a number of counties in California to involve extended family members, as well as community partners, in developing a plan that supports and provides necessary services to children and parents before, during, and after reunification efforts. The FGDM process creates a familial and community support system to protect children and to prevent re-entry into the system.
- The Family to Family model establishes networks of care that are neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located where children served by the system live. This model aims to increase the number of foster families and screens for services to safely preserve families.

- The Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Capped Allocation Demonstration Project (CAP), implemented on July 1, 2007, allows participating counties (Alameda and Los Angeles) to use Title IV-E funds to provide direct services to children and their families. This funding flexibility provides the counties an opportunity to develop prevention and up-front services through foster care savings and reinvestment. Los Angeles County plans to use the funding flexibility to develop, implement, and expand programs and supports to individualize services to children and families. Priority initiatives include 1) implementation of a county-wide prevention initiative focusing on locally based primary, secondary and tertiary prevention services and supports; and, 2) up-front assessments on high risk cases with expanded family preservation slots. Alameda County will pursue a series of reinvestment strategies to allocate financial resources toward prevention, early intervention, and long-term support strategies. Financial resources will be directed away from expensive congregate care and placed towards services and supports that are engaging, familial, community-based, and cost effective.
- The Linkages initiative is currently being implemented in 33 counties in California and provides for coordinated, comprehensive, individualized services to families to support them in achieving the linked goals of self-sufficiency and safety for their children when being served by child welfare and CalWORKS (TANF). Through protocols designed to enhance communication and case coordination between the social workers in child welfare and CalWORKS, these two departments collaborate to improve outcomes for at-risk children and families.

ITEM 4:

Risk Assessment and Safety Management. How effective is the agency in reducing the risk of harm to children, including those in foster care and those who receive services in their own homes?

POLICY

Child safety, permanency and well-being are California's primary child welfare priorities. California's goal is to ensure that every child has a safe, stable permanent home as quickly as possible. The Manual of Policies and Procedures, Division 31, Sections 31-101, 31-005.1.11, 31-005.1.12, and 31-320 set forth regulations for the handling of all suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect, from the emergency response stage to the closure of a case via family reunification or other permanency options. Each county child welfare agency is required to:

- Respond to all referrals for service alleging that a child is endangered by abuse, neglect or exploitation;
- Make every effort to establish an effective system of pre-placement preventive services for children through liaison with the courts, probation, law enforcement and other public and private agencies; and,
- Ensure that social workers visit children placed in out-of-home care monthly and monitor the safety of the child.

As describe earlier, the Standardized Safety Assessment System requires that as cases move forward to comprehensive assessment and service planning, services and resources are evaluated for effectiveness in reducing risk and potential for addressing necessary changes in family functioning as follows:

- Assessments are performed prior to completing the first face-to-face contact and are recorded within 48 hours.
- Risk Assessments are required on all substantiated and inconclusive in-person responses within 30 days of first face-to-face contact.
- Family strength and needs (including those of the caregiver) are assessed on all open cases (on initial cases, within 30 days of first face-to-face contact and at each six month review).

CHILD FATALITIES/NEAR FATALITIES: The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requires that states disclose to the public findings and information about cases of child abuse and neglect that result in fatalities or near fatalities.

The CDSS issued an All County Letter (ACL 06-24) informing counties of changes in policy regarding the process for reporting fatalities/near fatalities due to abuse/neglect and provided processes for public disclosure of information in cases of child abuse or neglect that result in fatalities or near fatalities. These changes brought California into compliance with federal CAPTA requirements. To comply with these requirements, California provides relevant case specific information not only on child fatalities where there is reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect, but also on near fatalities. The State provides to the public a case specific summary prepared by CDSS with the assistance of the county child welfare agencies and local probation agency.

In 1997, legislation was passed with the intent of improving coordination and integration of various State and local efforts to address fatalities due to child maltreatment. The California State Child Death Review Council was formed and is entrusted with the responsibility of collecting, analyzing and interpreting State and local data on child deaths and providing training and technical assistance to county level Child Death Review Teams (CDRTs). The purpose of county level CDRT is to reduce child abuse and child deaths by sharing information impacting public policy at the State and local levels and by enhancing the institutional ability to protect children by increasing communication among agencies. The CDRT's focus on investigation, system review, service planning including prevention strategies, and data collection. Participating agencies include: the Department of Justice, CDSS, Department of Health Services, California Coroner's Association, CWDA, Prevent Child Abuse California, California Homicide Investigators Association, Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect/National Center on Child Fatality Review, California Conference of Local Health Department Nursing Directors, California District Attorneys Association, as well as several regional representatives chosen by the Council.

Senate Bill 39 (Chapter 468, Statutes of 2007) allows for the release of specified information regarding a deceased child when the death is reasonably suspected to be the result of abuse

or neglect. The bill's provisions allow for the release of information within five days of the child's death. When a child's death is substantiated as being the result of abuse or neglect, the bill provides for establishing a process for releasing specified documents in the juvenile case file.

SAFELY SURRENDER BABY LAW (SSB) was signed into law in 2001 and extended indefinitely in January 2006 to ensure continued safety and protections for children. Under the SSB law, a parent or other person with lawful custody may safely surrender a baby within three days of birth, confidentially and without fear of prosecution for abandonment. The baby must be taken to a public or private hospital emergency room, designated fire station or other safe surrender site and shows no signs of abuse or neglect.

PRACTICE

- The use of the Standardized Safety Assessment System in all 58 counties is to systematically assess that children are protected and appropriate services are provided. Social workers utilize the approach throughout the life of a case to ensure the safety of the child and assess according to the policy stated above.
- Families receiving voluntary or court ordered family maintenance services are seen at least monthly by their social workers to provide support and to monitor services being provided. Social workers consult with community based service providers to review case plan goals and to determine if the services being provided remain appropriate.
- The child welfare agency has the responsibility to place children in foster homes or treatment facilities that are best suited to meet each child's specific needs. Social workers are required to provide support to foster parents to enhance the quality of the placement. This includes contact with foster parents and the children in their care.
- California is required to disclose to the public, findings and information about cases of abuse and neglect that result in fatalities or near fatalities. To provide relevant case specific information, a case summary is prepared by CDSS with the assistance of the county child welfare agency and the probation agency and is available upon request of the public or as otherwise required by law. Senate Bill 39 (described above) may change this practice.
- Babies who are safely surrendered at a hospital are given medical treatment and placed in a foster home or pre-adoptive home. At the time of surrender, a bracelet is placed on the baby for identification purposes and a matching bracelet is provided to the parent or lawful guardian in case the baby is reclaimed. A parent or person with lawful custody has up to 14 days from the time of surrender to reclaim their baby.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The State Data Profile indicates that the abuse of foster children in care is a rare occurrence in California. The State Data Profile (Element VII) indicates there was no substantiated abuse of children in foster care by a foster parent or residential facility staff in 99.49 percent of the 117,891 children served in foster care during the March 31, 2007 reporting period. This is a slight decline in performance from the Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005), where in 99.56 percent of the 120,720 children served in foster care, there was no substantiated cases of abuse. In Federal Fiscal Year 2006 (October 1, 2005-September 30, 2006), for 99.57 percent of the 118,568 of the children served in foster care there were no substantiated cases of abuse. This level of performance does not meet the national standard of 99.68 percent.

According to State Data Profile, Element XI, of the 117,891 children in care during the March 31, 2007 reporting period, 774 of them, or 0.66 percent, were reported as maltreated by a parent while in care.

Under the auspices of the California State Child Death Review Council, the California Department of Health Service (DHS) produces an estimate of the number of child abuse and neglect fatalities on the basis of an annual Reconciliation Audit conducted with county CDRTs. The Audit uses four statewide data systems (DHS Vital Statistics Death Records, Department of Justice Homicide Files and Child Abuse Central Index, and the Department of Social Services Child Welfare Services/Case Management System) and the findings from CDRT reviews. The Audits for 2003-2004 are still in progress. The best estimate available on the number of child abuse and neglect deaths for California is the results from the 2002 Audit, which is estimated at 140 total child abuse and neglect fatalities.

CHALLENGES

There is a need for national research and the increased understanding of the relationship between drug and alcohol abuse (including the timeliness of recovery) and child abuse/neglect; and, more collaboration in the development of evidence based services that will impact this population in a meaningful way.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The following family engagement practices (described in Item 3) are central to reducing risk of harm to children in their own homes and in out-of-home care as active family participation provides information that is critical to assessment and follow-through on service referrals:
 - Family to Family including the use of Team Decision Making
 - Parent Partners
 - Differential Response
 - Family Group Decision Making and other participatory case planning strategies
 - Wraparound Services

- Several counties (Contra Costa, Kern, Los Angeles, Placer, Sacramento, Stanislaus, Tehama, and Yolo) educate community members, biological parents, and foster parents about the child welfare system and how it works. Parents whom are educated on the processes of child welfare services may feel less intimidated which, in turn, assists the social worker in completing safety assessments and identifying kinship supports. The families are also more likely to request assistance or services. Community partners are educated to work with CWS, rather than separately, creating better service delivery for families. As the community becomes more informed on the dynamics of child abuse and neglect and how child welfare agencies intervene and provide services to families, individuals may be more inclined to report cases of suspected child abuse and neglect.

B. PERMANENCY

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

For the first Child and Family Services Reviews, California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. The State did not meet the national standards for (1) the rate of foster care re-entries, (2) the percentage of children achieving reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care, (3) the percentage of children discharged to finalized adoptions within 24 months of entry into foster care, and (4) the percentage of children in foster care for 12 months or less who experienced no more than 2 placements. Additionally, all of the items assessed for this outcome were rated as areas needing improvement. Key concerns included delays in achieving permanency for children through reunification and adoption. The goal of reunification was maintained for too long and courts were reluctant to approve TPR petitions unless the agency had an adoptive home for the child.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented to improve on this outcome included the following:

- Strengthened concurrent planning, including training to the courts on concurrent planning and terminating parental rights
- Identified and addressed unmet placement resource needs through Assembly
- Bill 636 Outcomes and Accountability Process
- The CDSS worked with and provided technical assistance to high priority counties to identify and address challenges, including Los Angeles County's 2003 adoption initiative, and with all counties in integrating issues of fairness and equity toward racial or ethnic groups into all decisions made by the child welfare service system
- Improved county-level data collection efforts
- Implemented common core curriculum for training new line workers and supervisors and ongoing training requirements

During the first PIP, the improvement goals for foster care re-entry and placement stability were not achieved.

ITEM 5:

Foster care re-entries. How effective is the agency in preventing multiple entries of children into foster care?

Policy

Once a child has been removed from the child's parent or guardian, the child must be returned unless the agency is able to provide sufficient evidence to the court to warrant continued detention of the child. Once the child has been removed and made a dependent or a ward of the Juvenile Court, California law requires review of the child's case at least every six months. At the status review hearing, held six months after the dispositional hearing and the permanency hearing, the court is required to order the child returned to the physical custody of the parent. If the court finds by a preponderance of evidence that such a return would pose a "substantial risk or detriment to the safety, protection, or physical or emotional well being of the child," the child is not returned home. Unless the agency demonstrates continued need for out-of-home care, it is required that the child be returned.

A child is declared a ward or a dependent, removed from the home of the parent and placed in an out-of-home placement upon the order of a judicial officer following a determination that removal from the physical custody of the parent is necessary for reasons related to the child's safety as well as public safety for a child who is a ward. The order of removal and placement may be modified by a juvenile court judicial officer and the child returned to the physical custody of the parent following a determination regarding the child's interests and safety in the home at a hearing held pursuant Welfare and Institution Code, Section 350(c), 366.21, 366.22, 388, 727.2, 727.3, 728, 782, or 778. The report of the social worker or probation placement officer prepared for the hearing, which recommends a return to the physical custody of the parent, must include a factual discussion of all of the issues, including:

- necessity and appropriateness of the child's placement during the period from the last review hearing to the present;
- efforts the department made to return the child to his/her home and finalize the permanent plan including the services to the child and each parent;
- progress made by the child and each parent;
- reasons the out-of-home placement is no longer necessary and the return of the child to the physical custody of the parent would not present a risk of detriment to the child;
- reasons the return to the parent's home is the appropriate permanent plan;
- recommended date for the return of the child to the physical custody of the parent; and,
- services provided to the child, if the child is 16 years or older, during the period of placement and the services recommended for the future.

California law does not authorize the use of trial home visits to transition the child to the custody of the parents after the child has been in foster care. Trial home visits were disallowed by the appellate courts [Savannah B. (2000) 81 Cal.APP 4th 158; Andres G. (1998) 64 CalAPP 4th 476; Damonte A. (1997) 57 Cal.APP 4th 894]. These cases held that a court finding necessary for removal (e.g. that there is substantial risk of physical harm to a child when in the parent's care) is

inconsistent with granting a visitation order for a trial home visit. Under current law, counties make the recommendation for the child to return home, and when the court orders return home it is with agency supervision for a period of time to ensure that the child is stabilized at home with supportive family services, at which time the case is dismissed. California data, however, indicates that a small number of children's placement types in CWS/CMS are recorded as "trial home visits". Although the reasons for this discrepancy are not certain, it is assumed that these are cases in which the child has been returned home by the court and the family continues to be under the supervision of the agency.

The State's policy is that all counties implement the Standardized Safety Assessment System as described in the Introduction section. This approach to the assessment of safety, risk, protective capacity, and family strengths and needs is designed to make consistent decisions about child removal and placement. As cases move forward to comprehensive assessment and service planning, services and resources are evaluated for effectiveness in reducing risk and potential for addressing necessary changes in family functioning. Decisions on case closure also address whether improvements have been made that assure the ongoing safety of children.

PRACTICE

- Implementation of a Standardized Safety Assessment System in all 58 counties, requires an assessment be done prior to children returning home. Social workers assess the safety needs of children and evaluate the capacity of parents or guardians to meet those needs prior to placing children in care and when a child's safety cannot be reasonably ensured through the provision of in-home services, they are placed in the least restrictive placement that best meets the needs of the child.
- Before returning children home from foster care, social workers increase the number of contacts with parents, children, and service providers to determine the likelihood of successful reunification. The Standardized Safety Assessment System is used to inform this decision. This assessment also defines the issues which require services and support during the reunification process.
- Family Group Decision Making and multi-disciplinary teams are utilized to determine appropriate services and supports for children and parents.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

According to the State Data Profile, of all children discharged from foster care to reunification in the 12 month period prior to the year shown, 14.1 percent re-entered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of discharge. This figure represents a decline of performance from Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004 – September 30, 2005) at 12.9 percent and Federal Fiscal Year 2006 (October 1, 2005 – September 30, 2006) at 13.9 percent. A re-entry rate of 14.1 percent in California compares with the national median of 15.0 percent and a 25th percentile of 9.9 percent. California is doing slightly better than the national median on this measure and has not yet made the 25th percentile. This measure represents the primary reason that California performance does not meet the national standard for Permanency Composite 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification.

Further analysis of the data indicates that when the last placement type is considered, Kin (8.5%) and Guardianship (7.5%) placements have the lowest percentage of re-entries within 12 months. Group Home placements have the highest percentage of re-entries at 15 percent.

A review of State data indicates a need to target improvement efforts toward the following specific age groups and placement types:

- under 1 year old and 11-15 year olds (the two age groups with the highest re-entry rate);
- 16-17 year olds (the age group with the lowest re-entry rate);
- group homes (combined group home and shelter placements) as the placement type with the highest re-entry rate; and,
- kin as the type of placement with the lowest re-entry rate

CHALLENGES

- Counties report that limited community resources, such as mental health and substance abuse treatment services, hinder providing appropriate and timely services for children and parents. Contributing factors limiting local resources include an insufficient amount of total available funding for services and supports; restrictive federal funding rules and eligibility criteria; and, an inadequate number of qualified providers.
- It is difficult to provide sufficient services and for families to complete services for reunification requirements in the period of time allowed. This is especially true for families with substance abuse treatment needs.
- The inability to use trial home visits as a way to gradually transition a child home is an additional challenge to preparing parents and the child(ren) for reunification. For example, children who return home from high level group homes are often very difficult for parents to manage, which may increase foster care re-entry. The support of a planned transition, supported by aftercare services, provides greater opportunity for successful reunification.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- In 2006, the State Interagency Team's Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Workgroup results included improving the collection of data on substance abuse by families in the child welfare, health and education systems as well as assisting counties in estimating substance abuse treatment needs for child welfare families. The workgroup developed a county survey of AOD screening protocols and tools to determine promising practices and recommendations for improving screening and referral.
- Thirty-five counties are currently utilizing Wraparound services to assure that families have adequate support systems and services in place as soon as the child returns home. Wraparound results in more intensive monitoring of a family's progress and allows issues related to potential reoccurrence to be identified and dealt with early. Wraparound services are limited to a relatively small number of children-those who have been in a high level group home.

- Under the Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project (CAP), implemented on July 1, 2007, both participating counties (Alameda and Los Angeles) have identified priority initiatives for the first phase of implementation that will support successful reunification and permanency. Alameda County will focus on the One Child, One Placement Model-child welfare workers for relative approvals and placement, enhancing Family Finding, expanding Reunification Team Decision Meetings, expanding CalWORKs – Child Welfare Services Linkages Pilot Project, and, implementing Permanency Concurrent Planning Team Decision Meetings. Los Angeles County will focus on expansion of Family Team Decision Making Conferences and focused Family Finding and engagement through pilot specialized permanency units at three regional offices.
- In State Fiscal Year 2006 -2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007), legislation added benefits to the basic Kinship Guardian Assistance Program (KinGAP) for eligible children. Under KinGAP, relatives who take guardianship receive benefits more closely matched to those benefits paid to foster parents for children who are placed in care by either child welfare services or probation departments.

ITEM 6:

Stability of Foster Care Placement. How effective is the agency in providing placement stability for children in foster care (that is, minimizing placement changes for children in foster care)?

POLICY

California's statutory and regulatory framework contains safeguards that aim to promote children's placement stability. Welfare and Institutions Code 16000 and Family Code 7950 require children be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting that is suitable to meet the child's needs and in a location as close as possible to the child's family. Consistent with these requirements, placement with a relative is preferred by statute.

Safeguards exist to prevent unnecessary moves once a child comes into care. The agency must notify the court, attorneys for the child, parents or legal guardians, and caregivers before any placement change. In circumstances where a child is moving to a more restrictive setting, a hearing must be held to determine necessity. Unless the child is in immediate danger, the placement agreement requires a notice be given to the foster parent or agency, by the party initiating the move, seven days prior to removal of a child.

The State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) budget includes a five percent rate increase for all foster family homes and group homes. This increase will take effect on January 1, 2008 and is expected to help sustain caregiver resources. By providing these additional resources to caregivers, meeting the needs of the children is less financially stressful to caregivers. For children with higher needs placed in group homes, this enables group homes to hire more qualified staff or retain more experienced staff.

PRACTICE

- Prior to placement in foster care, the social worker/probation placement officer makes an assessment of the child's placement needs and identifies the most suitable placement. The degree to which emergency shelter care is used depends on individual county practice. Emergency shelters are located in the following counties: Fresno, Humboldt, Imperial, Kern, Mendocino, Orange, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Sonoma and Yolo. Although a formalized data collection system related to emergency shelter care is not utilized by all counties, information obtained through CDSS visits at 10 of the 14 counties' emergency shelters indicates efforts toward reducing the number of children placed in shelters. This is being achieved through the use of programs such as the First Step program at the Orangewood Children's Home in Orange County, designed to locate foster families for children. The availability of emergency foster homes varies from county to county. For example, Kern County has a large network of emergency foster homes utilized for children ages 0-5, however in Orange County, a shortage remains. Currently, no specific data measures the comparison of placement stability in emergency shelter counties to those counties that do not offer shelter care.
- In all counties, information and training are provided to caregivers in an effort to maximize their ability to effectively parent the children who come into their care. The child welfare agency is required to provide foster parents and other providers' information that is pertinent to the child's needs, including educational, medical, family background and behavioral needs. Training is required of foster parents and available to relatives to improve their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the children in their care.
- Concurrent planning is being used in an effort to increase placement stability. Social workers/probation placement officers are required to develop simultaneous plans for children during reunification that include an alternate permanent plan in the event that reunification does not occur. By utilizing this model, the likelihood of children being placed with a caregiver who may provide permanence through adoption or guardianship is increased.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

According to the State Data Profile, California had a placement stability composite score of 92.2 for the period ending March 31, 2007 and has been a stable score of 92.5 from Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005). A score of 92.2 does not meet the national standard score of 101.5. On the three individual measures which compose this composite, California is close to the national median scores and ranks 21st out of 51 states reporting as of March 31, 2007:

- Of all children in foster care during the 12 month target period who were in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months (measure C4-1), 80.8 percent (national median = 83.3 percent) had two or fewer placement settings. California is below the 75th percentile of 86 percent.
- Of all children in foster care during the 12 month target period who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months (measure C4-2), 60.2 percent had two or fewer placement settings. The figure of 60.2 percent is near the national median of 59.9 percent. California is 5.5 percent below the 75th percentile which is 65.4 percent.

Of all children in foster care during the 12 month target period who were in foster care for at least 24 months (measure C4-3), 34.0 percent had two or fewer foster placement settings. This figure is close to the national median of 33.9 percent and is 7.8 percent below the 75th percentile of 41.8 percent.

According to an analysis of California's counties system improvement plans conducted by the Child and Family Policy Institute of California, the 13 counties that targeted placement stability showed a median improvement of 4 percent on the federal measure.

Upon removal, children are sometimes placed in an intentionally short term placement while relatives or other more suitable placement is located. This adversely affects placement stability data if the second placement is not well-chosen.

CHALLENGES

- Stakeholders reported that the challenge of caring for children/youth with emotional and behavioral disorders, as well as caring for youth with substance abuse problems, often taxes the resources of caretakers, which results in multiple placements. Additional support for caregivers (including relatives) and treatment options for children are needed.
- Stakeholders from the care provider community reported that contact with social workers is very helpful and supportive. However, they also indicated that social workers are not as available to care providers as care providers would like; the lack of availability was attributed to the demands of their workload.
- Stakeholders reported that limited availability of foster homes inhibits the ability to find the most suitable placement for the child. This also decreases the likelihood that siblings, particularly large sibling groups, can be placed together.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Team Decision Making (TDM), which focuses exclusively on placement, and Family Group Decision Making as used in California's counties are instrumental in preserving placements that may be in jeopardy. For example, from January 2004 to January 2006 Stanislaus County went from 76.8 percent to 82.1 percent of foster children with no more than two placements in 12 months as a result of using TDMs. A recent study (The Effect of Placement Move: TDMs in Contra Costa County) indicated the average number of placement changes significantly dropped after a TDM was held. Additionally, of the five anchor counties (Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange and San Francisco), four performed above the State as a whole in calendar year 2006. The anchor county performing below the State average has demonstrated a 10 percent increase in performance since 2002.
- Funding of \$4 million for State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007) for the Kinship Support Services Program (KSPP) provided support to relative caregivers. Currently, 21 counties are implementing or planning a Kinship Support Services Program.

- Meeting the mental health needs of foster children has been improved in California through the use of the Wraparound approach in 35 California counties. This model, as described in the Introduction section, aims to improve placement stability by engaging families and youth along with other stakeholders to identify their own needs and create methods to meet those needs. The collaborative team planning process addresses the barriers to effective treatment and support for a family with a child who has complex and enduring needs.
- In 2005, the Mental Health Services Act became law in California. One of the Act's priorities is developing and providing enhanced mental health services for children and youth with serious emotional disturbances including transition age youth. As counties implement their plans, it is anticipated the increased level of services to foster children may improve placement stability as well as other outcomes. It is too soon to know the impact of the increased services as counties are just beginning implementation of their plans.
- Los Angeles County, partially as the result of the Katie A. lawsuit, increased use of Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC). In lawsuit, a group of youth in foster care filed suit alleging that the State and county were unlawfully denying foster youth intensive individualized mental health, behavioral support and case management services. According to its originators, the goal of the MTFC program is to "decrease problem behavior and to increase developmentally appropriate normative and pro-social behavior in children and adolescents who are in need of out-of-home placement." Youth are placed in MTFC via referrals from the juvenile justice, foster care, and mental health systems.
- Multi-Disciplinary Assessments (MAT) of children upon entering foster care may assist in placement stability by providing comprehensive information regarding the child's behaviors and/or needs that may affect placement. In Los Angeles County, MAT provides initial health, mental health, developmental and education assessment for children in out-of home care. This information supports reunification goals.

ITEM 7:

Permanency goal for child. How effective is the agency in determining the appropriate permanency goals for children on a timely basis when they enter foster care?

POLICY

California law provides for several options at the time of the permanency hearing. The court may:

- return the child to the parent's home immediately;
- order up to six additional months of reunification services;
- terminate reunification services and order placement with specified "fit and willing relatives" or order a placement with an identified foster family, group home, or residential center and a specific goal; or,
- terminate reunification services and order the matter set for a Section 366.26 implementation hearing.

The court must find that either reasonable services were not provided to the parent or that there is a “substantial probability that the child will be returned and safely maintained in the home” when ordering up to six additional months of services. When making a finding of “substantial probability” of return, the court must also find that the parent has:

- consistently and regularly contacted and visited the child;
- made significant progress in resolving problems that led to the child’s removal; and,
- demonstrated the capacity and ability to complete the treatment plan objectives and provide for the child’s safety, protection, physical and emotional well-being and special needs. (Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP), Division 31, Sections 361.5(a)(3), 366.21(e), and 366.21(g)).

When terminating reunification services without referring the matter for a Section 366.26 implementation hearing, the court must find by clear and convincing evidence that a compelling reason exists for determining that a hearing held pursuant to Section 366.26 is not in the best interest of the child. The finding must also be made at post-permanency hearings for a child in an identified placement with a specific goal if the court does not order the matter set for a Section 366.26 implementation hearing (MPP, Division 31, Sections 366.21(g)(3) and 366.3(g)).

Although California’s Welfare and Institutions Code continues to use the term “long-term foster care,” the phrase no longer appears in the federal statutes and it is not a preferred placement under the Adoptions and Safe Family Act (ASFA). The ASFA mandates regular reviews of a child’s status and permanency options. To provide the specificity needed to ensure that the agency and the court regularly assess placement permanency and plan for the child’s future, the court should enter a placement order identifying, by name, the child’s placement and specifying the goal of that identified placement, without referencing it as “long-term foster care” or “planned permanent living arrangement.” The appropriate specific goal will depend upon the circumstances of the child’s situation. For example, for a child in an identified group home placement, the goal could be placement with a foster family or placement with a relative. Children who are unable to exit care may remain in planned permanent living arrangement with relatives or non relatives, or in a higher level of care (e.g., group homes) should they have such needs. Regardless, for children who remain in long term foster care, statute requires that the court reconsider adoption, guardianship and reunification at status review hearings. Children who remain in care also receive services to assist in their transitioning to adulthood through the Independent Living Program.

As part of the initial PIP, California law was amended to allow an additional 30 days (for a maximum of 60 days) to develop the case plan. This additional time is to allow for better engagement of the parents and youth in the development of the case plan and improve the likelihood of achieving reunification.

Unless the court finds that certain, specified exceptional circumstances exist, reunification is the initial permanency goal for all children removed from their homes. If family reunification is not ordered because exceptional circumstances exist or because efforts have failed, then the court establishes one of the other permanency options as the primary case plan goal.

With the implementation of concurrent planning over the past decade, any case with a primary case plan goal of family reunification must also specify a permanency alternative (e.g., adoption or guardianship) and the services necessary to achieve it if reunification is unsuccessful. County System Improvement Plans indicate that counties are continuing to implement practices and system changes that support concurrent planning.

California requires that children who are over the age of three receive no more than 12 months of reunification services, and children who are under the age of three receive no more than six months of reunification services. For all children, reunification may be extended to a maximum of 18 months if the court has determined there is a substantial likelihood that reunification will be successful within six months after the first 12-month permanency hearing.

PRACTICE

- Over the last five years, California has increased efforts to engage parents with the goal of achieving more effective case plans and placements while increasing the likelihood of reunification. Team Decision Making, Family Group Decision Making, parent partners/mentors, and ice-breaker meetings are examples of these efforts.
- Social workers/probation placement officers discuss progress towards reunification with parents throughout the life of the case. The information is provided to the court at six month review hearings. When reunification is not achieved within 12 months, a permanency hearing is held. The court determines whether there is substantial likelihood the child can be reunified if parents are provided another six months of services. If not, reunification services are terminated and the alternate permanent plan, established through concurrent planning, is ordered.
- The Judicial Review and Technical Assistance (JRTA) program at the Administrative Office of the Courts provides ongoing training to courts, child welfare agencies and probation departments about the requirement of establishing a timely permanency goal for each child.
- The Court Adoption and Permanency Resource Guide, updated annually, provides permanency-focused programs and resources for the courts and their partners. These programs and resources exemplify the promising practices statewide and nationally that are implemented at the local level. They include practices related to the following: (1) court outreach to the public; (2) court outreach to the media; (3) maintaining birth family relationships and finding lifelong connections; (4) collaborative permanency programs; (5) training, recruitment, and support for adoptive families; (6) open adoptions; and, (7) programs celebrating adoption finalizations. These materials can be found at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc.
- The Collaborative Permanency workshops provided statewide (described earlier in the Introduction section) offer an opportunity to share information on local and national permanency programs and to allow participants to learn and strategize about the development, utilization, and strengthening of these programs. The types of topics covered include: roles of each participant in

permanency planning; objectives; relative assessments; initial hearings—reasonable efforts, services, visitation; case plan development; finding relatives and connections for youth; concurrent planning; engaging youth in decision-making; and, expanding mediation

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Using a data measure constructed for the PIP, California met the improvement goal of 70.4 percent as reported in the Annual Program Service Report for Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004 – September 30, 2005). The most recent data for the quarter ending September 2006 indicates that the State is at 78.7 percent, which demonstrates steady improvement in the measure.

The timeliness of establishing permanency goals for children is further demonstrated by improved timelines to adoption. There has been an improvement in the percentage of children adopted. In 2002, 22.6 percent of children exited to adoption within 24 months and, according to the State Data Profile March 31, 2007 reporting period, 32.6 percent of children exited to adoption within 24 months. The median time until exit in 2002 was 36.6 months and as of March 31, 2007, was 29.7 months.

CHALLENGES

- When removal of children is related to parental substance abuse, reunification timelines do not provide adequate time for parents to successfully complete treatment needed to resume custody of their children.
- Some stakeholder groups suggested that court hearing continuances during the initial adjudication process sometimes delay the establishment of the permanency goal by the court.
- Determining whether a child who may be an Indian child is a member of a federally recognized tribe and providing notice to the tribe of court hearings, can lengthen the amount of time to reunification.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Four California counties (Alameda, Kern, Los Angeles and San Francisco) and one CDSS adoption district office will pilot a program to provide pre- and post-adoption services to families to ensure the successful adoption of youth who have been in foster care 18 months or more, are at least nine years of age, and are placed in an unrelated foster family or group home.
- In 2006, legislation enhanced basic KinGAP benefits, increasing benefits paid to eligible participants and expanding applicability to probation youth who had lived with a relative at least 12 consecutive months and had guardianship established with that relative. Enhanced program benefits include provision of the annual state clothing allowance, Specialized Care Increments (SCI) payments if the child was receiving an SCI payment while in foster care and any county clothing allowance the child would have received while in foster care.

This program is 100 percent State funded and the increase, which aligns the KinGAP payment with foster care payments, will allow more relative caregivers to become guardians without a substantial loss in benefits. This will increase the number of foster children exiting care to permanency with relatives.

- Counties are utilizing a variety of methods, including internet-based searches, to locate family members of children in placement. The goal is to identify families early in the placement process and to identify permanent placement options for children.
- The Administrative Office of the Courts has provided permanency trainings to many courts in the state through its Permanency Project, Dependency Representation, Administration, Funding and Training program (known as the DRAFT program) and the Court Improvement Program.
- The Court Adoption and Permanency Guide includes numerous examples of successful approaches to permanency in courts, CASA, and child welfare agencies
<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/programs/description/AdoptPermGuide.htm>
<http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/programs/description/AdoptPermGuideSuppl.htm>

ITEM 8:

Reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives. How effective is the agency in helping children in foster care return safely to their families when appropriate?

POLICY

California law requires, except in specified exceptional circumstances, that reasonable efforts to return the child to his or her family occur for at least 12 months; for children who are three years or younger, the time period is six months. Reunification services may be extended up to a total of 18 months only upon a finding of a compelling reason at the 12 month permanency hearing that there is a substantial probability the child will be returned if services are provided for another six months. When reunification services are terminated, the court is required to order a selection and implementation hearing to determine a plan of adoption or guardianship unless there is a compelling reason that adoption or guardianship is not appropriate for the child.

The policies to achieve timely permanency with family members have been further strengthened by recent legislation. Assembly Bill 408 (Chapter 813, Statutes of 2003), requires that for children age ten and older, who have been in foster care for at least six months, and are placed in a group home, the case plan and court reports shall include identification of individuals important to the child and the actions necessary to maintain contact with such individuals. The law facilitates connections for children.

Assembly Bill 1412 (Chapter 640, Statutes of 2005) was signed by the Governor in October 2005 to ensure that children and youth are actively involved in their case plan and permanency planning process as age and developmentally appropriate.

To improve data quality in the area of permanency, CDSS issued an All County Letter (ACL 03-61) which provided direction on monitoring placement and case closure. This letter provided data entry instructions to ensure more accurate reporting of case outcomes.

PRACTICE

- Child welfare social workers develop service plans for reunification based on services and assessment of needs. Services are identified that are designed to address safety concerns and achieve reunification in a timely way. Concurrent permanency goals are also established early in the case.
- Social workers have frequent contact with families, foster parents and service providers to evaluate progress towards meeting reunification goals. The court also reviews progress every six months and may order reunification with parents when safety concerns have been adequately addressed.
- Increased efforts at finding relatives and other people important to the child assist in achieving permanency.
- Family finding has been the focus of trainings provided through the Administrative Office of the Courts to the Court Appointed Special Advocates network and numerous multidisciplinary court stakeholders, including judicial officers, court staff, attorneys, probation placement officers and social workers.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The State Data Profile shows that for all measures of timely reunification for Permanency Composite 1, the State is making steady progress and, in most measures, is performing above the median. Factors influencing this improvement include the implementation of Family to Family. In Los Angeles County, there has been concerted efforts to address the permanency area, including making substantive changes to their policies and procedures.

According to the State Data Profile on Permanency Composite 1 (Element IX), which encompasses timelines and permanency of reunification, California has a composite score of 120.1 in the 12 month period ending March 31, 2007. This reflects steady improvement in the last two years. The figure of 120.1 is close to the federal standard of 122.6 or higher.

According to the State Data Profile, Point-In-Time Permanency Profile (Element VIII), the median months to discharge to reunification is quicker, over three reporting periods it decreased from 7.7 to 7.2 months.

According to the State Data Profile, First Time Entry Cohort Permanency Profile (Element V), the percentage of children discharged from foster care to reunification/relative placement increased from 88.4 percent to 92.7 percent over the last three reporting periods.

The Child and Family Policy Institute of California's Executive Summary of an analysis of counties system improvement plans reveals that the nine counties that focused on reducing the length of time to reunification improved a median of 16 percent on the State measure related to timeliness of reunification and 11 percent on the federal measure. These nine counties comprise over half of the State's foster care population.

For those counties participating in the Eleven County Pilot Project, the length of time of children who had been in care for 24 months or more decreased by 13.8 percent from 2001 to 2006. For example, Los Angeles County decreased the average length of time a child remains in foster care from 41.5 to 18.8 months from 2001 to 2006.

According to the U.C. Berkeley data on all children in foster care on January 1, 2005, of the children in care 24 months or more, 45 percent were placed with a relative, a guardian or in a pre-adoptive home.

CHALLENGES

- New efforts to target family finding and engagement strategies for children and youth who have been in care for longer periods of time and who would stay in care but for these efforts, will adversely affect performance on Permanency Composite 1.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The Family to Family model supports reunification through community connection, parent mentors and Team Decision Making.
- Dependency mediation is a practice which may be reducing time for reunification by resolving issues between social workers and families rather than through lengthy court hearings.

ITEM 9:

Adoption. How effective is the agency in achieving timely adoption when that is appropriate for a child?

POLICY

California statutes mandate that a permanency hearing be held within twelve months after the date the child entered foster care or immediately, at the dispositional hearing, if reunification services are not ordered. If the plan is adoption or guardianship, the court will set a selection and implementation hearing under Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 366.26. If a compelling reason documents why the termination of parental rights is not in the child's best interest, the court will immediately implement an alternate permanent placement.

Consistent with federal law, California statutes requires that action to terminate parental rights (TPR) be initiated when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months.

However, such action is not required if a compelling reason is documented in the case record that such action would not be in the best interest of the child. According to California law, at the time of the disposition hearing, the court may forgo reunification services in any one of 16 exceptional circumstances (Welfare and Institutions Code 361.5(b)). These circumstances include parents who are convicted of certain felonies, children severely abused or abandoned and a variety of other serious circumstances.

If family reunification is not ordered because of such exceptional circumstances or because reunification efforts have failed, then adoption, including TPR, becomes the primary case plan goal, unless a compelling reason to the contrary is documented. The following are compelling reasons not to terminate the rights of a parent:

- the child's parents have maintained regular visitations and contact and the child would benefit from continuing the relationship;
- the child is 12 years of age or older and objects to termination of parental rights;
- the child is placed in a residential treatment facility, adoption is unlikely or undesirable, and continuation of parental rights will not prevent finding the child a permanent family if the parents cannot resume custody when residential care is no longer needed;
- the child is living with a relative, (including an extended family member as defined by the Indian Child Welfare Act) foster parent, or Indian custodian who is unwilling or unable to adopt the child because of exceptional circumstances, and removing the child would be detrimental to the emotional well-being of the child. This reason does not apply to a child who is living with a non-relative foster parent and who is under the age of six or a member of a sibling group where at least one child is under the age of six and the siblings should be placed together;
- the court has found that there would be a substantial interference with a child's sibling relationship as compared to the benefit of legal permanence through adoption; and,
- the child is an Indian child and there is a compelling reason for determining that TPR would not be in the best interests of the child, including, but not limited to:
 - TPR would substantially interfere with the child's connection to his or her tribal community or the child's tribal membership rights.
 - The child's tribe has identified guardianship, long-term foster care with a fit and willing relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement for the child. (Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26(c)(1))

Children for whom a compelling reason not to terminate parental rights is documented at a given point in time are not excluded from adoption in the future. Adoption must be considered at each review hearing following the termination of reunification services. At that time, action to terminate parental rights will be pursued, or a compelling reason will be documented anew. At the selection and implementation hearing, the court is not permitted to terminate parental rights if:

- at each hearing at which the court was required to consider reasonable efforts or services, the court has found that reasonable efforts were not made or that reasonable services were not offered or provided; or,
- in the case of an Indian Child:

- at the hearing terminating parental rights, the court has found that active efforts were not made as required,
- the court does not make a determination at the hearing terminating parental rights, supported by evidence beyond a reasonable doubt, including the testimony of one or more “qualified expert witnesses”, that the continued custody of the child by the parent is likely to result in serious emotional or physical damage to the child. (Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26(c)(2))

When parental rights are terminated, the court retains jurisdiction over the child until an adoption is completed (Welfare and Institutions Code 366.3(a)). The adoption proceeding takes place in the juvenile court when the adoption is ordered (Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26(e)).

Beginning State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007) California increased funding for adoptions by 15 percent. Additionally, \$4 million in State General Funds was made available for a three year pilot in four counties (Alameda, Kern, Los Angeles and San Francisco) and a CDSS Adoptions District Office to increase the successful adoptions of older foster youth.

When the child’s permanency goal is adoption the current caregiver is to be considered first, otherwise, social workers seek family members who are willing and able to adopt. If relatives are not available, recruitment efforts are expanded to look at other potential adoptive families and include contact with private adoption agencies and other jurisdictions.

PRACTICE

- The majority of children who are adopted are adopted by either their foster parents or relative caregivers. In nearly 50 percent of these cases, children are adopted by relatives.
- When termination of parental rights has occurred and adoption is the goal, court hearings are regularly held to evaluate progress toward identifying an adoptive family and legally finalizing the adoption after the family is identified.
- The Judicial Council provided training through the Permanency, JRTA and DRAFT projects to the majority of courts in the state on the termination of parental rights and concurrent planning.
- Concurrent planning and permanency has been integrated into the California Social Work Education Consortium core training for social workers in California and also for probation placement officers’ training through The Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

According to the State Data Profile on Permanency Composite 2, Timelines of Adoptions, California’s score steadily improved. It went from a score of 90.8 in Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004 – September 30, 2005) to a score of 93.3 in Federal Fiscal Year 2006 (October 1, 2005 – September 30, 2006) to a score of 94.6 in the 12 month period ending on March 31, 2007. A composite score of 94.6 does not meet the federal standard score of 106.4 or higher. Although California is making steady progress on this measure overall, performance for adoption for children

who have been in care longer is below the national median. However, California is performing almost at the 75th percentile in moving quickly to adoption once parental rights are terminated.

The eight counties that focused their system improvement plans on timeliness to adoption showed consistent improvement. The counties that targeted the State measure, improved by a median of 58 percent and those that targeted the federal measure improved by a median of 41 percent. Those eight counties comprised more than half of the children in foster care in California.

CHALLENGES

- Unless the court finds that TPR would be detrimental to the child for one of the reasons listed above, at the 366.26 hearing the law requires that, “If the court determines, based on the assessment provided—and any other relevant evidence – that it is likely the child will be adopted, the court shall terminate parental rights and order the child placed for adoption. The fact that the child is not yet placed in a pre-adoptive home nor with a relative or foster family who is prepared to adopt the child, shall not constitute a basis for the court to conclude that it is not likely the child will be adopted” (Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26(c)(1)). Yet many individuals in the California system believe that parental rights should not be terminated unless it is highly likely that the child will be adopted. This approach is based on the desire to avoid creating legal orphans by terminating the parental rights of children who do not wish to be adopted or for whom an adoptive home is unlikely to be found.
- Foster parents and relative caregivers who want to adopt must complete an adoption home study. This process is lengthy and may delay completion of an adoption. Relatives who have foster children placed with them are often slow to complete the necessary tasks required for both the home study and the finalization process for a variety of reasons which may include a lack of urgency on their part. Early engagement and discussion with relative caregivers may reduce these barriers to complete the adoption process.
- The concept of adoption and termination of parental rights as it is established in California law and practiced in the field is often in conflict with cultural beliefs. For example, termination of parental rights for an Indian child will usually mean that the child will lose citizenship with his or her tribe as well as the benefits that flow from tribal membership. Such a change impacts generations that follow. Under current California law, parental rights of parents of any child, including Indian children, must be terminated for adoption to occur unless there are compelling reasons to the contrary (Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26). Senate Bill 678 expanded Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26(f) to specify when TPR is not in the child’s best interest: (1) when TPR would interfere with the child’s connection to his or her tribal community, or the child’s membership rights; or (2) the child’s tribe identifies an alternative permanent plan. While we have not conducted a survey for more precise information, we are informed by tribal representatives in our Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Workgroup that in many California tribes, adoptions are contrary to tribal custom and law. This has been further elaborated upon through information provided by the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). The ICWA Workgroup representatives have reported that adoption, with termination of parental rights, for some tribes, can mean termination of membership rights of the child.

- Stakeholders reported the recent increased emphasis on placing older, special needs children requires more time and resource intensive casework process and individualized recruitment strategies which lengthen adoption timelines.
- Stakeholders also reported counties are challenged with recruiting foster parents who are willing to adopt. When those foster parents choose to adopt, they often make a departure from foster care, therefore leaving the county with less foster homes.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- In State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007) California's budget included an increase of \$12.2 million to hire additional state and county adoption case workers. They are expected to produce an additional 1000 adoption finalizations annually.
- Collaboration between county welfare agencies and the courts sponsoring adoption finalization events such as "Adoption Saturdays" have brought more positive attention about adoption of children in foster care.
- Family finding efforts, which vary among counties, are being used to locate fathers and other relatives, neighbors and family friends who can serve as potential adoptive parents or lifelong connections for children exiting the system.
- Fourteen counties are involved in the California Permanency for Youth (CPYP) project which is funded by the Stuart Foundation (for more information see www.cpyyp.org). The goal of the CPYP is to implement new practices to achieve permanency for older children and youth.
- Beginning State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008), the maximum rate allowed for reimbursement to a private adoption agency for adoption of children in foster care doubled to \$10,000. It is anticipated this will result in improved adoption performance in the future.
- In State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007), \$4 million in State General Fund initiated the Older Youth Adoption Project in 10 counties with the goal of achieving increased adoptions of children nine years and older. Due to delays in the county selection process and project implementation, no data is yet available.

ITEM 10:

Other planned permanent living arrangement. How effective is the agency in establishing planned permanent living arrangements for children in foster care who do not have the goal of reunification, adoption, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives, and providing services consistent with this goal?

POLICY

California law requires upon termination of reunification services the court order a selection and implementation hearing to determine a permanent plan. Only if there is compelling reason that adoption or guardianship is not a suitable plan may courts bypass this hearing.

During all permanency and post-permanency review hearings, held at 12 and 18 months respectively after the dispositional hearing, all permanency options are to be considered. For children in long term foster care, permanency options are to be reconsidered at each status review hearing.

Legislation (Assembly Bill 519, codified as Welfare and Institutions Code 366.26(i)(2)) was enacted in 2005 to allow a child to petition the court to re-establish parental rights if the child has not been adopted within three years. This presents additional opportunities to achieve reunification.

In order to further facilitate permanent connections, Assembly Bill 408 (Chapter 813, Statutes of 2003), requires that efforts be made to identify, evaluate and promote relationships between foster children and other important people in their lives.

Assembly Bill 1412 (Chapter 640, Statutes of 2005) was enacted to ensure that children and youth are actively involved in their case plan and permanency planning process as age and developmentally appropriate.

PRACTICE

County Child Welfare programs utilize case review and permanency hearings and the permanency hearing process to ensure that adoptions are conducted in a timely manner. Adoption staffings occur on every child in the county prior to their final dependency status review. The purpose of the staffing is to assess the likelihood the child will become adopted.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

According to the State Data Profile, Permanency Composite 3, for the children in foster care for 24 months or more, the rate to exit to permanency before their 18th birthday decreased by 1 percent from Federal Fiscal Year 2005 (October 1, 2004-September 30, 2005) when it was 17.7 percent to Federal Fiscal Year 2007 (October 1, 2006-September 30, 2007) when it was 16.7 percent which is below the national median of 25 percent. Of all children who emancipated before turning 18 years old or turn 18 years old while in foster care, 53.8 percent were in foster care three years or longer. This number improved to 51.1 percent in the reporting period of March 31, 2007. The national median is 47.8 percent; the 25th percentile is 37.5 percent. For this measure, a lower score is preferable. California ranks 16 of 51 states.

According to the University of California, Berkeley (U.C. Berkeley) data on all children in foster care on January 1, 2005, of the children in care 24 months or more, 45 percent were placed with a relative, a guardian or in a pre-adoptive home. Additionally, the number of children in the same population placed in group homes declined more than 17 percent. However, the total population of

children in care 24 months or more declined over 27 percent, revealing that progress toward reducing longer stays in foster care is happening more slowly for children placed in group homes. It is anticipated that this trend will be reversed by the many Family Finding programs that have been implemented locally. Further analysis of changes in the population of children who have been in foster care more than 24 months reveals that there has been a substantial increase in the

percentage of children designated as runaways, most notably in the probation population. Some of the issue is undoubtedly a data quality problem of cases not being closed.

CHALLENGES

- In order to effectively achieve permanency for children in care for longer periods of time, caseload funding methodology needs to recognize the increased workload needed to achieve this goal over and above that of simply maintaining children in placement.
- Child welfare services agency staff and foster and relative caregivers may need additional training on the needs of older youth and the strategies to achieve permanency for them.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Those counties currently involved with Family to Family are implementing policy and practice changes to increase permanency for older youth including extensive relative searches and targeting recruitment for foster adoptive homes for older youth.
- Multiple efforts are targeted at increasing permanency options for older youth:
 - Stakeholders reported that the Permanency Partners Program in Los Angeles County and other similar family finding programs in other counties have been successful in locating families for older youth.
 - Los Angeles County because of its size is able to have an “older youth unit” which specializes in exiting youth to permanent placements and has significantly increased legal permanency.
 - The California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP), funded through multiple foundations and currently in 14 counties (Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Monterey, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Sonoma, and Stanislaus), also helps achieve permanency for this group of children (www.cpyp.org).
 - Many counties in California have developed foster youth advisory boards to increase the voice of youth in policy and practice decisions.
 - The California Connected by 25 Initiative, also funded by foundations and in place in Fresno, Humboldt, Orange, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus counties, helps public child welfare agencies and their communities develop comprehensive transition aged foster youth supports and services.
 - California CASA Association’s network has established permanency for older youth as one of its statewide priorities.

- California was chosen to participate in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care. The Academy, which runs from June 2006 through December 2007, provides a unique opportunity for six state teams to work together, with the assistance of national and state experts, to improve outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. One of the three key goals of the Policy Academy is permanence which seeks to ensure that every youth will have lifelong connections with family and supportive adults. Specific recommendations will be issued following the completion of the academy.

Permanency Outcome 2:

The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

For the first CFSR, California did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. Five of the six items assessed for this outcome were rated as a strength; the key concern pertained primarily to preserving connections for children in foster care.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented included the following:

- The CDSS worked with, and provided technical assistance to, high priority counties to identify and address challenges.
- Integrated Tribal perspectives into core training curriculum.
- Conducted focused ICWA training and measured ICWA compliance through the Assembly Bill 636 quality assurance process.
- Reviewed policies and procedures with foster family agencies and group home facilities to ensure worker understanding of the need to maintain connections and to remove barriers to compliance so that agency social workers/probation placement officers maintain a child's family and community connections.

ITEM 11:

Proximity of foster care placement. How effective is the agency in placing foster children close to their birth parents or their own communities or counties?

POLICY

California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Section 16501.1(c) states a child must be placed in a safe and appropriate placement that is least restrictive, most family like, in close proximity to the parental home whenever possible and best suited to the child's needs. Furthermore, the selection of the placement is to consider proximity to the child's school.

California law (WIC, Section 362.2) requires if the child needs to be placed out of the county in which the parents reside, the specific reason for such a placement be documented in the case plan as well as the resources that were lacking that led to the out of county placement.

PRACTICE

- When initially placing children, social workers seek relative and foster care settings that keep children within their own communities and school districts. Data indicates that children who are placed with relative caregivers are more likely to be placed in close proximity to their home.
- When a placement within the original school district is not available, the social worker makes every effort with caregivers to transport children to the school they were attending prior to removal.
- California's common core curriculum for all newly hired social workers includes training on the importance of placing children in close proximity to the community from which they were removed and with kin caregivers if possible.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

California is doing well in placing foster children close to their birth parents or their own communities or counties. Data from the U.C. Berkeley website (http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare) related to children who entered the system from January 1, 2005 to December 31, 2005 indicates that 61.3 percent of children placed with kin and 35.5 percent of children who were placed with non-kin were placed five miles or less from their home address.

CHALLENGES

- Stakeholders reported the proximity of placement is problematic in communities that already experience a shortage of approved foster homes. In some cases, the most appropriate kin placement is not located close to the child's parents and community, thereby requiring the placement of children outside of their community.
- During the stakeholder input process, social workers/probation placement officers reported children with special needs often require placement in treatment facilities that are not near the communities from which they were removed.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Family to Family is used in 25 California counties and encompasses over 85 percent of the children in the child welfare system. One of its core strategies is the recruitment of resource families which then allows for children to be placed in their own communities. An example of the impact of this approach is Riverside County increased the number of foster homes available in Family to Family targeted communities by 15 percent from September 2005 to September 2006.
- Many counties in California have recruitment strategies for ethnic specific homes. For example, Sacramento County has "convenings" for Asian Pacific Islanders to educate them about foster care and encourage them to become foster parents.

ITEM 12:

Placement with siblings. How effective is the agency in keeping brothers and sisters together in foster care?

POLICY

In any case which a social worker places a minor into custody pursuant to Section 306 of Welfare and Institutions Code 16002(b), the social worker shall, to the extent that it is practical and appropriate, place the minor together with any sibling(s) or half-sibling(s) who are also detained or included in the report prepared pursuant to Section 319. The social worker shall explain to the court why the siblings are not placed together and what efforts he or she is making to place the siblings together or why those efforts are not appropriate. The law also requires siblings to receive notice of a dependent siblings' court hearings.

Assembly Bill 1412 (Chapter 640, statutes of 2005), revised the provisions to apply to a child who is 10 years of age or older and who has been in an out-of-home placement. It provides that a child be given an opportunity to participate in the development of a case plan and state his or her preference for foster care placement.

Assembly Bill 408 (Chapter 813, Statutes of 2003), requires for children age 10 and older, who have been in foster care for at least six months and are placed in a group home, the case plan and court reports shall include the identification of individuals important to the child and the actions necessary to maintain contact with such individuals.

Recent legislation recognizes the importance of sibling relationships and allows for the preservation of ongoing sibling connections to be a compelling reason for not proceeding with the termination of parental rights or adoptions.

The CDSS issued an All County Information Notice (ACIN I-05-05) to provide direction on maintaining family connections. California regulations currently require group homes and foster family agencies to provide the services identified in the case plans developed by child welfare service agencies. The needs and services plans developed by group homes and foster family agencies must incorporate the family connection elements of those case plans. These requirements are intended, in part, to ensure that each needs and services plan addresses the issue of family connection and to ensure that group homes and foster family agencies, in collaboration with placement agencies, adhere to those plans.

PRACTICE

- Maintaining sibling relationships is a high priority for social workers when seeking placements for children, exhausting all options before separating siblings. When it is necessary that siblings be separated, social workers arrange for visitation between them.

- California's common core curriculum for all newly hired social workers includes training on placing siblings together whenever possible.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

California continues to do a good job placing dependent children with all or some of their siblings. In 2004, California placed 42.9 percent of all children who had siblings with all of their siblings and 66.5 percent with all or some of their siblings. In the next three years those figures significantly improved. In 2007, 47.2 percent of all children with siblings were placed with all their siblings and 68.9 percent were placed with all or some of their siblings.

In January 2003, 44.9 percent of Indian children in out-of-home care were placed with all of their siblings and 65.2 percent were placed with all or some of their siblings. In January of 2006, 49.9 percent of Indian children in out-of-home care were placed with all of their siblings and 71.1 percent were placed with all or some of their siblings. A comparison of the data over time demonstrates a positive trend of that maintains family ties by keeping Indian children sibling groups intact.

CHALLENGES

- Placing and maintaining children in the same foster home is more complicated if siblings are placed at different times. When a sibling of a child who is already in foster care is removed, there may not be room in the foster home for the second (or third) sibling. Thus, placement stability must be weighed against placing siblings together.
- Locating foster homes that are able and willing to care for large sibling groups, especially when some of the children have significant emotional, behavioral and/or developmental concerns is often challenging. Large sibling groups tax the resources of caregivers who may not be able to take all siblings unless they are provided with additional supports. Additionally, licensing requirements may limit the allowed number of siblings placed in one home.
- Stakeholders reported when siblings have different fathers, some relatives are reluctant to accept children for placement who are not related to them by blood.
- Children with specialized needs often require placement in treatment facilities which require they be temporarily separated from their siblings.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Safe Measures, a management tool available to counties and CDSS, allows supervisors to monitor and track how well individual workers are able to place siblings together. This information provides immediate feedback to workers and program administrators.
- Family to Family's core strategy of developing resource families in communities makes it more likely that families will be available to take sibling groups when needed.

ITEM 13:

Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care. How effective is the agency in planning and facilitating visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings placed separately in foster care?

POLICY

California Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 362.1; and Manual of Policies and Procedures Division 31 Sections 31-320.52, 31-325.33, and 31-340.2 require social workers/probation placement officers to arrange for visits between children and their parents, guardians and grandparents according to minimum specified schedules set forth in the child's case plan.

All County Information Notice (ACIN I-05-05) provided direction on maintaining family connections. California regulation currently requires group homes and foster family agencies to provide the services identified in the case plans developed by child welfare service agencies. The needs and services plans developed by group homes and foster family agencies must incorporate the family connection elements of those case plans. These requirements are intended, in part, to ensure that each needs and services plan addresses the issue of family connection and to ensure that group homes and foster family agencies, in collaboration with placement agencies, adhere to those plans.

Pending Community Care Licensing regulations scheduled to go to public hearing by the end of 2007, eliminate barriers to parental and sibling visitation.

Assembly Bill 408 (Chapter 813, Statutes of 2003), requires that for children age ten and older, who have been in foster care for at least six months, and are placed in a group home, the case plan and court reports shall include identification of individuals important to the child and the actions necessary to maintain contact with such individuals.

Assembly Bill 1412 (Chapter 640, statutes of 2005), requires social workers to ask a child who is 10 years of age or older and who has been in an out-of-home placement for six or more months, about important relationships and to support those relationships

PRACTICE

- When placement of siblings together in the same home is not possible, a case plan is prepared to provide for ongoing and frequent interaction among siblings until family reunification is achieved, or, if parental rights are terminated, as part of developing the permanent plan for the child.
- California's common core curriculum for all newly hired social workers/probation placement officers includes training on visitation between parents and children and between siblings.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

For the second round of the CFSR, the CDSS added questions to its survey to cover additional areas of interest, this area is one of the new additions. To obtain baseline data for our statewide assessment, interviews were conducted February to July, 2007 of a sample of parents in open cases as of January 31, 2007. The CDSS plans to conduct the survey annually to measure

progress. Baseline data indicates that 65 percent of foster children had contact with their parents in the prior 2 weeks; 46 percent of foster children had contact with siblings in other foster care placements in the prior 2 weeks.

CHALLENGES

- Transportation and geography are issues in arranging visitation. Although social workers/probation placement officers make an effort to place children near their parents and with or near their siblings they are sometimes placed, by necessity, at long distances from them because there are an insufficient number of foster homes/care facilities in areas where they are needed.
- Stakeholders mentioned difficulties in arranging visitation between incarcerated parents and their children. Correctional facilities allow visitation in most instances, however, parents are often incarcerated in locations far removed from their children. Even when parents are incarcerated nearby there are often serious logistical issues that need to be overcome to arrange meaningful visits between parents and children.
- Visitation is a more complex concept than simple numbers of contacts between siblings or between parents and children. It has important psychological and emotional component related to continuing the sense of attachment between primary family members. Policies and practices which focus primarily on meeting the court's requirement for a minimum number of visits per week or month are often not adequate to accomplish the true goals of the visitation.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Family to Family focuses on placement in the local community, and/or with relatives, and encourages mentoring relationships between parents and resource families. Team Decision Making, which is an important component of Family to Family, helps to guide placement decisions and focuses participants on the importance of visitation.
- Some counties in California are using Parent Child Interactive Therapy as a model of helping to train parents on positive interaction with their children. When families are engaged in this treatment, parents and children are together an hour a week for 20 weeks.
- The PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development, and Education) Program, which was developed by the Illinois Department of Family and Children's Services and the Child Welfare League of America, is used in many counties for the initial training of potential foster and adoptive parents and encourages ongoing contact with parents and provides training on how caregivers can be involved in visitation in meaningful ways.
- Contra Costa County uses Parent Partners to help foster and adoptive parents understand the perspective of parents which may make caregivers less reluctant to facilitate visits between parents and their children.

- The Family and Youth Services Bureau, within the ACF, which administers the Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program, awarded a three year grant to the Dry Creek Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California to develop a program to address the issues faced by children of incarcerated parents. Under this grant, the Dry Creek Rancheria (a federally recognized Indian Tribe) has provided one-on-one mentoring to qualified youth; professional tutoring services for school aged children; one-on-one counseling to children over age 10; facilitated quarterly visits to parents incarcerated outside the county jurisdiction and monthly visits to parents incarcerated in local or county facilities; and worked with more than 75 members from the tribal community. The primary aim of this program is to increase a child's success socially and in the classroom and to reduce the current and future number of incarcerated tribal members.

ITEM 14:

Preserving Connections: How effective is the agency in preserving important connections for children in foster care, such as connections to neighborhood, community, faith, family, tribe, schools, and friends?

POLICY

Assembly Bill 408, enacted in 2003, requires that for children age 10 and older, who have been in foster care for at least six months, and are placed in a group home, the case plan and court reports shall include identification of individuals important to the child and the actions necessary to maintain contact with such individuals.

The enactment of Senate Bill 678 to strengthen Indian Child Welfare Act compliance emphasizes maintaining connections to the tribal community. Senate Bill 678 was enacted in August 2006 and became effective January 1, 2007. The bill codified Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), into various California codes where child custody proceedings covered by ICWA take place. The legislation explicitly stated the public policy that it is in the interest of an Indian child that the child's membership in the child's Indian tribe and connection to the tribal community be encouraged and protected and be designed to prevent the child's involuntary out-of-home placement. It further provides that where necessary to remove and place a child, whenever possible, a placement should reflect the unique values of the child's tribal culture and is best able to assist the child in establishing, developing, and maintaining a political, cultural, and social relationship with the child's tribe and tribal community. Senate Bill 678 also explicitly states that it is in the interest of an Indian child that the child's membership in the tribe and connection to the tribal community be encouraged and protected, regardless of whether or not the child is in the physical custody of an Indian parent or Indian custodian at the commencement of a child custody proceeding, the parental rights of the child's parents have been terminated, or where the child has resided or been domiciled. (Family Code 175, Probate Code 1459, and Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 224). Senate Bill 678 contains numerous provisions where cultural ties are required to be considered at different stages of proceedings.

Sibling Contact: Assembly Bill 2488 became effective on January 2007. This bill lowers the age from 21 to 18 years of age or older when an adoptee or sibling may complete the Waiver of Rights to Confidentiality for Siblings form. This bill also allows an adoptee or sibling under 18 years of age to complete a waiver form if the birth parent, adoptive parent, or the dependency court consents. If there is not a waiver form from each of the siblings in the adoption file, the adoptee or sibling may file a petition in the superior court under Family Code Section 9205 to appoint a confidential intermediary to contact the adoptee or sibling to attempt to obtain a waiver form. As part of the veto package in State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008) Budget, implementation of Assembly Bill 2488 has been delayed one year.

The CDSS issued All County Information Notice (ACIN I-05-05) to provide direction on maintaining family connections. California regulations currently require group homes and foster family agencies to provide the services identified in the case plans developed by child welfare service agencies. The needs and services plans developed by group homes and foster family agencies must incorporate the family connection elements of those case plans. These requirements are intended, in part, to ensure that each needs and services plan addresses the issue of family connection and to ensure that group homes and foster family agencies, in collaboration with placement agencies, adhere to those plans.

PRACTICE

- When children require out-of-home placement social workers make concerted efforts to place them with relatives in their home community and in their current schools when possible and appropriate. Contacts with families and friends and continued connections to their cultural, religious and other community based activities are strongly encouraged.
- When a decision is made to place a child in out-of-home care social workers/probation placement officers develop case plans to preserve cultural, educational, social and other community connections.

When children are identified as possibly being an Indian child, the agency involved notifies the appropriate tribe and requests their involvement at the earliest possible point. The CDSS tracks that a child is identified as an Indian child and that notice is sent to the tribe(s) pursuant to Assembly Bill 636, the Outcomes and Accountability System. The CDSS is made aware of specific cases related to issues questioning compliance with noticing requirements through feedback from stakeholders and appellate changes which come to the attention of CDSS. Further feedback is received from counties, the Child Welfare Directors Association, and CDSS' ICWA specialist who provides technical support to counties, tribal representatives, families, and other members of the public.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

This is an item that was passed in the first PIP. The CDSS survey shows that of the families surveyed, 85 percent of their children in foster care had their primary connections preserved, including extended family, friends, community and racial heritage.

CHALLENGES

- Agency challenges to preserving important connections for children in foster care, such as connections to neighborhood, community, faith, family, tribe, schools, and friends are very similar to the agency challenges discussed in Item 13 which was related to the agencies effectiveness in planning and facilitating visitation between children in foster care and their parents and siblings placed separately in foster care. Stakeholders also indicated that ICWA compliance issues interfere with maintaining connections to tribe. Perhaps the most significant challenge in preserving connections is the current scarcity of available resource families for children within their own communities.
- Connections with incarcerated parents are difficult to achieve because of the myriad of logistical problems associated with incarceration. Two examples are: restrictions associated with visitation make scheduling difficult and travel to a facility that is outside of the county.
- When a parent fails or refuses to divulge cultural or other pertinent information needed for preserving connections, it is challenging to maintain connections for children and youth.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Family to Family focuses on placement in the community, and/or with relatives, and encourages mentoring relationships between parents and resource families. Team Decision Making, which is an important component of Family to Family, helps to guide placement decisions and focuses participants on the importance of visitation.

ITEM 15:

Relative Placement. How effective is the agency in identifying relatives who could care for children in foster care, and using them as placement resources when appropriate?

POLICY

California Welfare and Institutions Code, Sections 361.2 and 361.3; Manual or Policies and Procedures, Section 31-405.1(b) regarding placement requires that a child be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting possible. Based on this policy, placement options are considered in the following order of priority: non-custodial parent, relatives, tribal members (if applicable), foster family and group home. When the child cannot return home, the court is required to determine if there is a relative who is able and willing to care for the child. Social workers are required to search for relatives and approve relative home placements. California's law also provides for emergency placement with relatives to avoid placement with non-related caregivers. Additionally, the Relative and Foster Care Emergency Fund is available to provide for one time assistance to purchase items such as smoke detectors or beds to meet approval or placement requirements. Such assistance can remove barriers to placements with relatives. The greatest numbers of children placed in out-of-home care are placed with relatives.

PRACTICE

Early in the court process, usually at the detention hearing, parents are asked for the names and addresses of all adult relatives to use in locating an appropriate placement for their children. Workers engage in a search process to locate identified relatives who might be able to care for the children.

After social workers/probation placement officers have identified potential relative caretakers, an assessment process is initiated to ascertain suitability for placement.

When arranging for a child's placement, the social worker gives preferential consideration to the child's grandparents, aunts, uncles, and adult siblings.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The improvement in placing children with kin is attributed to the increased efforts by courts, social services policy, and State statute emphasis on relative placement. For example, in 2003, California had 34.2 percent of its foster children placed with kin. By October 2006, 36.5 percent of California's children were placed with kin. In Los Angeles County, which has more dependant children than any other county in California, the percentage of children placed with kin caregivers rose to 8.7 percent in the same time period.

CHALLENGES

- In some instances, the reluctance to working with child welfare is a barrier. For example, undocumented immigrant populations fear deportation; tribal families experience a general lack of trust in working with county and State governments; for other parents, there is concern about their children residing with relatives due to past or current familial differences.
- When fathers are not identified and/or located, paternal relatives are often unknown and therefore are not possible placement resources.
- The relative approval process is stymied at times when relatives cannot be exempted for crimes committed long ago and/or crimes that do not seem to be related to the potential safety and well being of children who might be placed in their care.
- The placement of child(ren) with relatives is often an unplanned event and relatives require additional supports and services as the children placed may be sibling groups or have special needs.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The use of Family to Family, Family Group Decision Making and other family engagement strategies, contribute to identifying relatives who could care for children, and enables social workers to use relatives as placement resources when appropriate. For example, the use of Team Decision Making at initial placement often results in early identification of relatives appropriate for placement. Other successful strategies include concurrent planning and family finding to locate relatives.

- The expansion of kinship support services in State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007), enhances relatives' abilities to care for the children in their care and makes more relative placements possible. KinGAP and Enhanced KinGAP both help preserve kinship placements by providing financial support and continued eligibility for services. Providing services increases the likelihood the child will remain with relatives resulting in placement stability. The Kinship Services Support Program (KSSP) which provides services and support to kin caregivers was expanded from 11 counties to 14 in State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 and will continue to expand in State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) with an additional 15 counties.

ITEM 16:

Relationship of child in care with parents. How effective is the agency in promoting or helping to maintain the parent-child relationship for children in foster care, when it is appropriate to do so?

POLICY

California law recognizes the importance of parent child visits and the child's visits with the parents. Expectations for visit frequency vary with the parents' availability (e.g. incarceration), case plan goal, child's needs, placement, etc. The court may require that the visits be supervised. California case law prohibits the use of trial home visits.

California requires the placement agency to arrange for visits between children and their parents, guardians and grandparents according to minimum specified schedules. All County Information Notice (ACIN I-05-05; see item 13) provided direction on these requirements.

PRACTICE

- Social worker/probation placement officer practices regarding parent/child visits depend on the child's needs, placement, case plan goal, parents' availability and county resources. All efforts are made to meet the child's needs.
- While establishing and monitoring the case plan, social workers/probation placement officers assess the quality of the parent-child relationship and determine what services are necessary to maintain the relationship.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The CDSS survey results indicate that 59 percent of parents felt their social worker helped them in their effort to have their child(ren) return home.

CHALLENGES

- Caregivers expressed logistical and safety concerns regarding parent-child visitation. At times caregivers are reluctant to have parents visit their children in the caregivers' home. Caregivers with multiple children in their care must juggle schedules, other children's visits, and handle child care issues if they are to take a child to another location for a visit.

- Other challenges include transportation and social worker resource limitations for supervised parent-child visits.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Family to Family encourages placement with relatives whenever possible and placement within the child's community if relative placement isn't possible. Through the use of Team Decision Making, parents are engaged and involved in establishing case plans and visitation guidelines.
- Practices such as ice breaker meetings and parent partners, facilitate relationship building between caregivers and parents which promotes improved parent-child visitation.

C. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Well-Being Outcome 1:

Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

ITEM 17:

Needs and services of child, parents, and foster parents. How effective is the agency in assessing the needs of children, parents, and foster parents, and in providing needed services to children in foster care, to their parents and foster parents, and to children and families receiving in-home services?

For the first Child and Family Services Review, California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1 because the service needs of children and families were not consistently met, parents and children were not consistently engaged in case planning, social worker visits with parents often were not sufficiently frequent or not of sufficient quality to ensure children's safety and promote attainment of case goals. One of the four items that comprise this Outcome, worker visits with children, was, however, an area of strength.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies to improve this Outcome included:

- Implemented a comprehensive approach to assessing safety, risk and needs.
- Provided technical assistance to high priority counties to identify and implement promising practices, developed a promising practices guide containing successful practices from high performing counties and increased the number of counties, including Los Angeles County, that use the Family to Family Initiative.
- Issued guidance to counties through All County Information Notice (ACIN I-64-03) and All County Letter (ACL 05-07) clarifying that case plans require family engagement and the importance of documentation of child and family involvement in the case planning process.

- Worked with California Youth Connection (CYC) to ensure that youth voice and involvement are integrated into the case planning process.
- Provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on good case planning practice, including involvement of all family members in case planning and the need to visit with parents when such visits are part of the plan; comprehensive assessment of all children's needs, including assessing all in-home children's needs.
- Expanded the time allotted to develop an appropriate case plan from 30 days to 60 days.
- Developed and implemented a framework for a differential response.
- Worked with counties to ensure that they integrate issues of fairness and equity toward racial or ethnic groups into all decisions made by the child welfare service system.

POLICY

California Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 16501(c) states the county shall provide child welfare services, as needed, pursuant to an approved service plan. Welfare and Institutions Code 16501(g) states that family maintenance services are activities designed to provide in-home protective services to prevent or remedy neglect, abuse, or exploitation, for the purposes of preventing separation of children from their families. The Manual of Policies and Procedures Division 31, Section 31-20111 specifies an assessment is completed for each child whom child welfare services are to be provided. Manual of Policies and Procedures Section 31-205 specifies what factors should be considered in the assessment. These include relevant social, cultural and physical factors relating to the child, the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) or person(s) serving in that role, and other significant persons who reside in the home; apparent problems and causes; and whether the child may remain safely in the home. Counties utilize one of two risk assessment tools. The case plan is to include a summary of the health and education records, a mental health status, and other needs of the child. California's policy regarding contacts with the child, parent, and foster parents as set forth in statutes requires that the social worker/probation placement officer must have specified contacts with these individuals to assess the needs of the child and gather and monitor the effectiveness of services being provided by the placing agency. Based upon this policy, social worker/probation placement officer visits are necessary in order to meet the needs and services of the child, parents, and foster parents.

California requires that group homes, foster family agencies, and foster family homes have a needs and services plan for children placed in care. The needs and services plan shall be developed by the placement agency social worker or by the group home social worker to address the services to be provided and shall be consistent with the child welfare case plan.

PRACTICE

- Identifying the child's and family's needs is part of the child welfare services case plan which documents an array of services to be provided including contacts made by the social worker/probation placement officer with the child, parent, and foster parent to address specific service needs and monitoring of those services. In order to implement the case plan, social workers/probation placement officer make referrals to health, mental health and other services as appropriate for additional services to the child, parent, and foster parent to achieve the case plan goals.

- Social workers/probation placement officers visit children and families and the purpose of these visits is to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the services being provided, gather information and to evaluate the progress of the desired goals, and to establish a cooperative relationship between the social worker/probation placement officer and the child, parent, and foster parent.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

As part of California's first Program Improvement Plan, CDSS implemented a survey to measure improvement in specific areas. A telephone interview was conducted each following year of a new random sample of about 4,000 parents selected statewide from our Child Welfare Services System. The aim was to interview about 1,000 parents from each of four groups: parents in our Family Maintenance and Permanent Placement programs, and the foster and birth parents in our Family Reunification programs.

For the CFSR 2 the CDSS added questions to the survey to cover additional areas of interest. To obtain baseline data for our statewide assessment, we conducted interviews February to July, 2007 of a sample of parents in open cases as of January 31, 2007. The CDSS plans to conduct the survey annually to measure progress.

The CDSS demonstrated, as part of the PIP, that improvement was made in meeting the needs and services of those receiving child welfare services. The most recent CDSS statewide survey showed that in 65 percent of the cases, the children or parents had their needs assessed. About 80 percent of those stating that they had needs reported that they had received services.

CHALLENGES

- The shortage of qualified service providers presents a challenge for social workers/probation placement officers when identifying needed resources. Additionally, the provision of specific services, particularly psychotherapy and counseling for children, can be disrupted by placement changes.
- Concurrent planning sometimes results in conflicts between caregivers who don't really see themselves as "temporary" and parents who are trying to reunify.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Family to Family encourages placement with relatives whenever possible and placement in the child's community if relative placement isn't possible. Through the use of Team Decision Making, parents are engaged and involved in establishing case plans and visitation guidelines.
- Under current Department of Health Services (DHS) requirements, physicians are expected, as part of a comprehensive health assessment, to screen each child entering foster care for developmental delays. Beginning in State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008), CDSS will have staff focused exclusively on establishing and disseminating new protocols for surveillance, screening and assessment for mental health issues and developmental delays for every child entering foster care. In partnership with the DHS, the Department of Mental Health,

and the Department of Developmental Services, CDSS will provide county child welfare service agencies the structure for identifying the mental health and developmental needs of foster children at initial placement. Needed services and supports will be in place at a significantly earlier age, greatly enhancing the prospects for short- and long-term clinical success.

- In partnership with the Department of Education (CDE), CDSS is identifying and disseminating information on the specific responsibilities of county child welfare service and juvenile probation agencies in identifying and meeting the educational needs of foster children and youth. The CDSS will provide technical assistance to counties regarding compliance with new statutory requirements on the educational rights of children in placement and their parents with the goals of assessing and meeting every child's individual educational needs, protecting the rights of children and parents, and reducing the disruptive effects of foster care placement changes. The CDSS and the CDE are establishing important local partnerships between educational agencies and county child welfare service agencies.
- The Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Capped Allocation Project (CAP) requires participating counties to engage with their community and service delivery staff for input and participation. Los Angeles County has identified the recruitment, development and utilization of community-based placements as a priority. Alameda County has targeted family relationships and connections of children served by the child welfare system to be preserved as appropriate. Alameda's strategies include the enhancement of Team Decision Making and concurrent planning.
- The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) had created a tool for children's rights called Every Child/Every Hearing: How to ensure the daily well-being of children in foster care by enforcing their rights. Trainings on this checklist have been given statewide for courts, attorneys, social workers and probation placement officers. It is available at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/pdffiles/EveryChild.pdf

ITEM 18:

Child and family involvement in case planning. How effective is the agency in involving parents and children in the case planning process?

POLICY

As part of the State's PIP, legislation was enacted to increase the time allowed to complete the case plan from 30 to 60 days with the goal of increasing child and family involvement.

Assembly Bill 1412 (Chapter 640, Statutes of 2005) was subsequently passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor on October 7 2005, to ensure that children and youth are actively involved in their case plan and permanency planning process as age and developmentally appropriate.

California has best practice guidelines for assessment of children and families for the development of a family-centered, strength-based assessment and planning process across the full spectrum of child welfare and foster care services.

The CDSS issued All County Information Notice (ACIN I-28-99) on Wraparound standards identifying expectations that must be met by counties and providers. Many of the standards articulate the values and philosophy of engaging families that can be utilized across all programs. Examples are:

- families have a high level of decision-making, empowering all aspects of planning, delivery, and evaluation of services and support;
- individualized family plans are comprehensive and cover the priority life domains of the child and family; and,
- plans are based on the critical needs of the child and the family as identified by the family and the child and family team.

Practice

- In Family Maintenance cases, social workers are required to complete initial case plans within 30-60 days and to update them every six months. Social workers engage children and parents in the case planning process through a variety of ways, such as Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) and family conferencing. These practices bring children, family and their support network together to discuss and determine the processes for the family's success in developing and reaching their case plan goal(s). The case plan describes the reasons for the protective service plan and an assessment of the families' strengths and needs. Case goals specific to safety, permanency, and well being are established as well as strategies to achieve them.
- In Family Reunification cases social workers/probation placement officers are required to complete the initial case plans within 30-60 days of removal and to update them every six months. Children, parents, and other persons involved in the case are expected to be involved in the case planning process. In counties where Family to Family has been implemented, this is accomplished through Team Decision Making. The plan addresses visitation with parents and siblings, independent living plans for adolescents, and specific child safety, permanency, and well being goals.
- Core training for social workers/probation placement officers cover practices that involves the child and family in the development of the case plan.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

We demonstrated, as part of our PIP, that we improved in meeting the needs and services of those receiving child welfare services. The CDSS statewide survey showed that in 93 percent of the cases, the case plan was discussed with the birth or foster parents or with the child.

CHALLENGES

- Engaging parents early in the process can be particularly challenging when children are removed. Some of the barriers include parental distrust and anger, direction from their attorney about participation before adjudication is achieved, and non-English speaking children and parents.
- High caseloads, the requirements of CWS/CMS in regards to the case planning, and frequent court review hearings require considerable social worker time and make it difficult to fully involve parents and children in the case planning process.
- Engaging non-English speaking children and parents is challenging due to language and cultural differences. Additionally, the case plan format is available in a number of languages but often is not understood by both the client and the social worker/probation placement officer.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The Family to Family program encourages placement with relatives whenever possible and placement in the child's community if relative placement isn't possible. Through the use of Team Decision Making, parents are engaged and involved in placement decisions and visitation guidelines.
- Participatory case planning strategies, such as Family Group Decision Making and family engagement models, encourage early and regular family involvement in case planning.

ITEM 19:

Caseworker visits with child. How effective are agency workers in conducting face-to-face visits as often as needed with children in foster care and those who receive services in their own homes?

POLICY

The California Manual of Policies and Procedures, Sections 31-320.3—31.320.312(a) and Sections 31-320.4, 31-320.412 require the frequency of the social worker's/probation placement officer's visits with the child to be established in the case plan. The standard frequency for face-to-face visits is monthly, unless the child's needs require more frequent visitation. For in-home cases, the social worker is required to visit each child with an approved case plan who remains in the home at least once a calendar month, however, this can be reduced to once every two months if certain criteria have been met and supervisory approval obtained and documented.

For each child with an approved case plan who is placed in out-of-home care with a relative, foster family home, Foster Family Agency (FFA), or a legal guardian, the social worker/probation placement officer must visit the child at least once each calendar month. The social worker/probation placement officer shall be permitted to have less frequent visits, up to a minimum of once every three calendar months, only if certain criteria are met and written supervisory approval has been obtained. A portion of each visit is to be spent with the child alone and outside of the presence of a caregiver.

Consistent with new federal requirements, California is currently developing a plan using funds under Title IV-B to increase social worker visits with children in foster care to monthly. This plan will be submitted to the federal government by June 2008. California is working with public and private agency stakeholders to implement the new federal requirements regarding visitation. These changes will involve, at minimum, these key areas:

- visitation requirements, purpose of the visits, and documentation
- reducing the circumstances in which a visitation exception may be granted
- identifying alternate data collection processes
- reporting requirements for contract agencies

Data regarding social worker visits at the individual county performance level is available to the public and monitored by CDSS.

PRACTICE

- When children are placed in out-of-home care, social workers/probation placement officers visit with caregivers and the children in their care on a monthly basis. Although visits with children do occur at school, in the child welfare agency office, or other off-site locations, social workers/probation placement officers are encouraged to meet with the child in their home environment or placement.
- Children placed in Foster Family Agency (FFA) certified homes are visited by their social worker at least twice a month in addition to any visits made by the county child welfare agency social worker.
- In family maintenance cases social workers visit children in their homes on a monthly basis to review progress with parents regarding their case plan.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Of all children who required a monthly social worker visit, the percent who received a monthly visit has increased by 6.6 percentage points from September 2003 (86.4 percentage points) to September 2005 (92.1percentage point) per the CDSS statewide survey.

CHALLENGES

- Federal requirements stipulate that states have procedures developed to track and report social worker visit data. California currently uses the state's SACWIS system, the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to capture data on social worker visits. The state will continue to use this system for federal reporting on this issue. However, because Foster Family Agencies, with whom counties have placement agreements, do not have access to input data to CWS/CMS, an alternate method of collecting/reporting the data is being explored.

- Social work/probation placement caseloads in California make it difficult at times for social workers/probation placement officers to have high quality visits while they are attempting to meet timeframes for frequency of visitations with children in in-home and out-of-home placements.
- Geography and/or severe traffic congestion must be overcome in many California counties in order for visits to take place between social workers/probation placement officers and children.
- Some youth stated that social worker turn-over and workloads directly impacted the youth's ability to establish trusting and productive relationships with their social worker.

PROMISING PRACTICES

In Los Angeles County the courts are requiring that social workers' reports to the court have documentation and discussion related to social worker visits with children.

Some counties have moved toward eliminating all the exceptions to the monthly visitation mandate, requiring monthly face to face visitation for children in out-of-home care. Although this may be good casework practice, it produces an additional serious strain on social worker resources.

ITEM 20:

Worker visits with parents. How effective are agency workers in conducting face-to-face visits as often as needed when parents of children in foster care and parents of children receiving in-home services?

POLICY

California Manual Policies and Procedures, Division 31 Sections 31-325.2, 31-325.4 and 31-325.3, require the frequency of the social worker's visits with the parents to be established in the case plan. The standard frequency for face-to-face visits is monthly, unless the parents' needs require more frequent visitation. Reduction to the monthly visitation requirements may be made under specified circumstances and with written supervisory approval. For in-home cases, the social worker must be permitted to have less frequent visits, up to a minimum of once every two calendar months, only if certain criteria are met and written supervisory approval has been obtained.

For out-of-home cases, the social worker/probation placement officer shall visit each parent/guardian named in the case plan whose child(ren) is placed in out-of-home care at least once each calendar month, unless the case plan contains documentation justifying less frequent visits and written supervisory approval has been obtained.

PRACTICE

- Social workers visit with parents whose children remain in the home on a regular basis to provide support and monitor the services being provided to the family.

- When children are placed out-of-home, social workers/probation placement officers make a face-to-face visit with parents regularly to provide support and assess progress on case plan goals. The frequency of visits beyond the mandatory monthly visits is determined by the social worker's assessment of the parents' progress and need for additional support.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Data on social worker visits with parents from CWS/CMS in Family Maintenance and Family Reunification cases indicates an 11 percentage point increase between March 2002 and December 2006. This data represents improved performance.

CHALLENGES

- A significant number of parents who have children in the child welfare system may have been incarcerated at some time during their child's involvement in the system. Numerous stakeholders indicated visits with incarcerated parents is very challenging due to complex logistical arrangements such as proximity of parent to child, transportation, and visitation limitations of prison/jail.
- In trying to cope with the logistical demands of required number of visits with parents, social workers may choose to conduct these visits in their office which detracts from assessments they might be able to do if they were able to meet more often with parents in their homes. The quality of visits is also adversely affected by the lack of bilingual and bicultural staff who may be able to more effectively engage parents.
- When a child's parents are not located in the same geographic area as the child and social worker or even in the same state it is difficult to have regular visits between the social worker and the parents.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The use of the Safe Measures management tool allows for social worker supervisors to more closely monitor the frequency of visits between social workers and parents.
- The involvement of parents early in the process through the use of participatory case planning approaches, often has the effect of lowering their resistance to contact with the social worker/probation placement officer. Lower resistance on the part of parents may result in fewer "no shows" or "not at home" instances when the social workers/probation placement officers are trying to meet with parents. In addition, the process may result in a higher level of commitment to the plan on the part of the parents.

Well-Being Outcome 2:**Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.**

For the first Child and Family Service Review, the State was not in substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. The key concern identified was that in some cases children were not receiving services to address the needs identified through educational assessments.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies to address this concern were:

- Provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on assessing all in-home children's educational needs and issued All County Information Notices (ACIN I-80-04 and I-10-05) that instructs counties to ensure that educational needs for all children in the home are assessed and document how the identified educational needs were addressed in the case plan.
- Developed protocols for counties and local school districts to improve educational services to children with identified needs.

ITEM 21:

Educational needs of the child. How effective is the agency in addressing the educational needs of children in foster care and those receiving services in their own homes?

POLICY

For children who are in-home, the parents are responsible for their educational needs, however, California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16010(a); California Manual of Policies and Procedures, Division 31 Sections 31-206.351, 31-206.352 and 31-405(m) require that each dependent child's case plan include the following:

- names and addresses of the child's educational providers
- child's grade level performance
- child's school record
- assurances that the child's placement in foster care takes into account proximity to the school in which the child is enrolled at the time of placement
- a record of the child's immunizations
- child's known medical problems
- child's medications

If any of the required health and education information is not contained in the case plan, the case plan shall document where the information is located. The social worker/probation placement officer is also required to ensure that arrangements are made to monitor the educational progress of each child.

Legislation enacted in 2004 (Assembly Bill 490, Chapter 862) requires school districts and social services agencies to provide educational equity for foster children. Each school district must have an educational liaison that is charged with facilitating the proper educational placement, enrollment in school, and checkout from school of foster children.

PRACTICE

The Foster Youth Services Program (FYS) which was originally a group home program was expanded by legislation to include all foster youth and is now in 57 county offices of education. The FYS, under the auspices of the Department of Education, provides instruction, counseling, tutoring, and other educational supports services for foster youth. FYS staff collaborate closely with child welfare staff to obtain educational records, streamline inter-district transfers of students, and to obtain needed services for foster youth.

- The social worker/probation placement officer assesses the child's educational needs and makes an appropriate referral for services. The Health and Education Passport (HEP) is developed and provided to the caregiver within 30 days of placement.
- The State Interagency Team (SIT) provides a forum in which state agencies collaborate on issues related to dependent children including the educational needs of foster children and efforts to better communicate and track related data.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Data from the FYS showed that only .28 percent of the 3,238 of the foster youth served during school year 2004-2005 were expelled from school which was significantly below the .34 percent statewide expulsion rate for all students. This .28 percent figure for foster youth was a .14 percent improvement over the previous school year.

Between school years 2002-2003 and 2004-2005 the average number of days to transfer school records for foster children was reduced from 5 days to 2.9 days as a result of FYS programs and activities.

CHALLENGES

- There is often confusion about who is legally entitled to represent a child in an educational meeting or proceeding. For example, motivated foster parents might attend an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting on behalf of a foster child but unless there is a court order granting them educational rights they do not have the authority to represent the child.
- When foster children change schools their education is adversely affected in a variety of ways. For example, when testing for a foster child's possible need for special education services is interrupted before completion, federal regulation requires the testing be completed again from the beginning by the new district. This education regulation often delays the provision of services that foster children need to take advantage of in their new educational setting.

- Within CWS/CMS, there is an educational passport section in which social workers can input data related to a foster child's educational progress. Accurate data in this section would help social workers in meeting the educational needs of these children. The interpretation of educational rights laws and regulations by many school districts often makes it difficult for child welfare agencies to easily and quickly obtain school records for the children in their care. Consequently, the educational passport is not making the contribution to case management and educational outcomes that was intended.
- Social workers, parents and foster parents often do not have the training to effectively advocate for children within the educational system. Educational advocacy is not included in the core curriculum; however, an advocacy training curriculum has been developed and provided through Regional Training Academies for social workers and probation placement officers. Foster parents and Court Appointed Special Advocates have also attended the training(s).

PROMISING PRACTICES

Several counties have initiated new approaches to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in foster care. For example, San Bernardino County hires educational advocates; Los Angeles County uses pro bono attorneys to advocate for its foster children in educational related hearings; and, San Diego shares data across the system. Another example is the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council which was created by the Board of Supervisors in 2004 and charged with raising the educational achievements of foster and probation youth throughout the county. This group brings together stakeholders responsible for the educational performance of foster and probation youth. Its purpose is to coordinate efforts across organizations and jurisdictions and to encourage networks of people to collaborate and to expand best practices in this area.

- Public-private partnerships, such as the San Diego County Tutor Connection Program, are providing additional services to foster youth. The Tutor Connection, a collaborative between education programs, Casey Family Programs, and the Health and Human Services Agency, instructs teachers in training about the unique educational needs of foster youth and has them provide one-on-one tutoring for a youth in foster care.
- The Chaffee Education and Training Vouchers Program provides resources to make vouchers available for post secondary education and training for youth who have aged out of foster care at the age of 18 or who have been adopted from the foster care system after the age of 16.
- The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) had created a tool for children's rights called Every Child/Every Hearing: How to ensure the daily well-being of children in foster care by enforcing their rights. Trainings on this checklist have been given statewide for courts, attorneys, social workers and probation placement officers, available at: www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/pdffiles/EveryChild.pdf

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children Received Adequate Services to Meet their Physical and Mental Health Needs

In the first CFSR, California did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3 although the State was highly effective in meeting children's physical health needs (Item 22), it was less consistent in its efforts to address children's mental health needs (Item 23), particularly for children in the in-home services cases. A key concern identified by stakeholders was that mental health services are not always available or of sufficient quality to meet children's mental health service needs.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies included:

- Issued an All County Information Notice (ACIN I-83-04 and I-04-05) that instructs counties to document how identified mental health needs are addressed and on the importance of assessing the needs of all children in families with in-home cases.
- Provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on assessing all in-home children's mental health needs.
- Worked with the State Department of Mental Health, County Welfare Directors Association, County Probation Officers Association and County Mental Health Directors Association to improve and expand access to mental health services.

ITEM 22:

Physical health of the child. How does the State ensure that the physical health and medical needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services?

POLICY

Each child in placement is required to receive a medical and dental examination, preferably prior to, but not later than, 30 calendar days after placement. The assessment shall be performed by, or under the supervision of, a licensed physician, and provide:

- a record of infectious or contagious diseases which would preclude care of the child by the facility
- test for tuberculosis
- a record of immunizations and childhood diseases
- identification of the child's special problems and needs
- identification of any prescribed medications being taken by the child
- ambulatory status

Specific requirements as set forth in California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 324.5; Manual of Policies and Procedures Division 31 Section 31-206.361; Title 22—Division 6, Chapter 7.5, Article 6 for medical examinations are required in circumstances when a child is removed due to physical or sexual abuse and that records are available to treating practitioners.

California state policy does not address this item as it pertains to in-home children service cases. Social workers educate and assist families with programs that provide medical and dental care.

PRACTICE

- Public health nurses are placed in county child welfare agencies to monitor medical and dental visits and psychotropic medications as well as input of data into the child's health passport. They also accompany social workers investigating child abuse and neglect to assess the physical condition of children. In addition they help social workers monitor chronic medical conditions that foster children may have and work with families with in-home service cases and children placed in out-of-home care.
- Social workers/probation placement officers ensure that the child receives medical and dental care through the Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program, or equivalent preventive health services in accordance with the CHDP program's schedule for periodic health assessment. The CHDP program requires frequency of exams in the table that follows.

Age of the Child	Interval Until Next Exam
Under 1 month old	1 Month
1 month through 6 months	2 Months
7 months through 15 months	3 Months
16 months through 23 months	6 Months
2 years through 3 years	1 Year
4 years through 5 years old	2 Years
6 years through 8 years old	3 Years
9 years through 19 years old	4 Years

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The CDSS has been collaborating with counties to develop a data measure as part of California's Outcome and Accountability System, to help monitor and track medical and dental services provided to foster children. The proposed measure is complete and preliminary data has been provided to the counties for review before being made public. An all county information notice is currently being developed which will provide data input instructions related to this measure.

Preliminary data on this measure indicate that at least 85 percent of foster children have received medical exams in accordance with CHDP guidelines; over 55 percent have received dental exams as recommended by the CHDP.

CHALLENGES

The limited number of providers who accept Medi-Cal presents a barrier to obtaining medical and dental exams particularly in rural areas. Foster children who are placed out of state have a difficult time accessing medical care as providers are unwilling to accept or are unfamiliar with Medi-Cal.

ITEM 23:

Mental/behavioral health of the child. How does the State ensure that the mental/behavioral health needs of children are identified in assessments and case planning activities and that those needs are addressed through services?

POLICY

In accordance with California Welfare and Institutions Code, Sections 319.1, 357 and 370, when the court finds a minor to be a person described by Section 300, and believes that the minor may need specialized mental health treatment while the minor is unable to reside in his/her home, the court shall notify the director of the county mental health department in the county where the minor resides. The county mental health department shall perform the duties required under Section 5694.7 for those minors. Nothing in this section shall restrict the provisions of emergency psychiatric services to those minors who are involved in dependency cases and have not yet reached the point of adjudication or disposition, nor shall it operate to restrict evaluations at an earlier stage of the proceedings or to restrict orders removing the minor from a detention facility for psychiatric treatment.

The juvenile court, in any case before it in which a petition has been filed, may order the social worker/probation placement officer to obtain the services of those psychiatrists, psychologists, or other clinical experts as may be required in the conduct or implementation of that treatment.

California Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16010(b) and the Manual of Policies and Procedures Division 31 Section 31-310 require the social worker/probation placement officer to monitor the child's emotional condition and to arrange for case management, counseling and therapeutic day services, and other service-funded activities specified in the child's case plan as necessary to meet the child's needs.

Additionally, any court report or assessment required shall include a copy of the current health and education summary.

PRACTICE

- A CHDP health examination is required for all foster children and includes a socio-emotional developmental screening that can result in a referral for further mental health assessment.
- The Children's Systems of Care, utilized in all counties, is the formal interagency structure used by child welfare to address mental health treatment planning and placement options.
- The CDSS provides cross-training for providers, county mental health and child welfare staff, which contributes to building relationships that result in effective collaboration.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Since the last review, qualitative data was collected using three surveys measuring the percentage of children in which mental health services needs were assessed and the percentage of children with mental health needs who received services. The final CDSS statewide survey of parents and foster

parents indicated improved performance, specifically the survey showed that 60 percent of the children have had a mental health screening; and, of those who needed services, 65 percent received them.

CHALLENGES

- Stakeholders report that communities do not have the resource capacity to provide early intervention services to meet the needs of children who require less intensive treatment before their condition grows more severe. Stakeholders reported that there is a lack of comprehensive services as well which results in difficulty of securing appropriate treatment options including prescribing psychotropic medication.
- Tracking the usage of psychotropic medication for foster children is a significant challenge. In California, a juvenile court is required to authorize use of any psychotropic medication or change in psychotropic medication by a foster child. California does not yet have a universal process for ensuring full surveillance, screening and diagnosis of mental health services for foster children.
- Older foster youth expressed the need to be included in and consulted with in discussions about the decision to take psychotropic medications and to be better informed about their rights relating to medication. Youth also suggested that it was important that their mental health treatment should occur within a context that allowed them to participate more fully in their treatment planning.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Several counties throughout the state have embarked on initiatives that provide mental health screening, mental health assessment, and evidence based treatment for 0-5 year olds. For example, San Bernardino County formed a collaborative which includes behavioral health, the Regional Center, child welfare, the Special Education Local Planning Area offices, the Children's Network, Loma Linda University Medical Center, and First 5 to establish three centers countywide which would provide comprehensive mental health assessments of 0-5 year old children. Another goal of the collaborative was to expand community capacity for specific mental health treatment strategies for the 0-5 year old population.
- Collaborative efforts between county child welfare agencies and their partners have resulted in increased/improved services to children and parents. For example, the co-location of mental health staff with child welfare staff in many counties increases the quality of mental health assessments and the overall mental health services available to foster children. Another example is in Los Angeles County, juvenile court in collaboration with Los Angeles Department of Children's Services developed a very comprehensive protocol for reviewing the use of psychotropic medication with foster children.
- The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) provides new money for many different and new mental health services and supports. "Mental health services and supports" is the term used to describe the help provided to people who have serious mental and emotional problems. The MHSA represents a comprehensive approach to the development of community base mental health services for the severely mentally ill as well as prevention and early intervention services.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS



A. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

For the first CFSR, California was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. While the Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) is constantly evolving to meet the State's program needs, the system structure and design has not dramatically changed.

ITEM 24:

Statewide Information System. Is the State operating a statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months has been) in foster care?

POLICY

Pursuant to Senate Bill 370 (Chapter 1294, Statutes of 1989) and federal law (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993), California maintains the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) as its federal Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The CWS/CMS was developed to automate many of the tasks county child welfare staff performed routinely and often manually. The CWS/CMS contains data on all children and families receiving child welfare services in California and tracks legal status, locations, demographic information and case plan goals for these children and families. Child welfare staff can create, read, retrieve and/or update information in this database. The system makes calculations, stores data, prints reports and documents and performs a full range of processing and case management functions.

Federal legislation (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993) established functional system requirements, which have been largely met. Of 87 required SACWIS elements, the State of California has incorporated 73 (60 fully implemented and 13 partially implemented) in its CWS/CMS system. The SACWIS requirements that have not been fully met are primarily related to interfaces with other systems. These areas include: Titles IV-A, IV-D, IV-E and XIX data systems; improvements in adoption services and case plan documentation and financial management for payments of foster care and adoption assistance. Efforts to improve and/or implement these areas are currently in development. (See Data Discussion section) Completion dates are dependent upon funding availability and the State and federal approval process.

The enactment of Assembly Bill 636 Outcomes and Accountability Process placed increased importance on the need for accurate, timely and complete CWS data. The CDSS has issued various All County Information Notices (ACINs) and All County Letters (ACLs) to assist counties in meeting critical CWS program documentation, data reporting, and program performance measurement requirements in accordance with Assembly Bill 636. The CDSS now routinely incorporates data entry instructions into ACINs and ACLs to remind county staff to follow program policy and data entry protocols to continuously improve data in the CWS/CMS. From a broader perspective, and over the course of the last seven years, CDSS has issued approximately 23 directives aimed at enhancing the integrity of CWS/CMS data from a functional aspect or a program area level.

PRACTICE

- The CWS/CMS is capable of tracking the child's location, demographics and permanency goals for all children in foster care and their families. The system is used at every level of the child welfare system. The CWS/CMS application provides critical information for timely child welfare intervention and case management. Timely and current data entry practice is incorporated into the CWS/CMS application by using business rules to the extent that they are logically enforceable for the case situation. County and statewide data is available to child welfare administrators to support program management, budgeting and quality assurance activities. Examples of functionality of the system at the case level are:
 - The "Referral" management function, which is the primary intake portion of the CWS/CMS, has extensive information on alleged victims, caretakers, family members, siblings, collateral contacts and perpetrators. The referral function includes functionality for processing referrals, conducting investigations and assessing the need for services. It allows recording information related to the child's medical and educational histories, allegations, investigations, placements or residences and any petitions filed on behalf of the child. In addition to the petitions, detention hearing reports, court findings, orders and results can be tracked within a referral.
 - The "Search" function is a valuable user tool. Through this function, a social worker can search throughout the State for history of child abuse involving a specific adult perpetrator or child. This ability provides child welfare staff with information that has proven valuable in assessing maltreatment risk.
 - The "Case" management function in CWS/CMS includes tools for developing service plans, determining whether the agency can provide services, authorizing the provision of services and helping social workers manage the delivery of services. This function is designed to contain data on court reports, court orders and case plans.

Examples of functionality of the system at the management level include:

- Inform policy and program decisions: the CWS/CMS is the primary source of data for analysis of the child welfare program and the population it serves. This data includes ethnicity, location, age, sex, maltreatment type and frequency, case plan goals, etc. Based upon data from this system, CDSS routinely publishes statistics related to the child welfare and foster care caseload. Additionally, this system is the source of California's reporting of adoption and foster care data to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
- Evaluate program performance: CWS/CMS enables timely child welfare data to be made available to a wide variety of stakeholders. The University of California, Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), under contract with CDSS, maintains a longitudinal database at both State and county levels of children in foster care, using CWS/CMS data. Based on this data, key child welfare performance indicators are routinely published on a public website.

- Make budgetary projections: CWS/CMS provides current and historical caseload information essential to accurately project future caseload growth and needed resources. This caseload information provides the basis for State allocation of child welfare funds.
- Improve service delivery: CWS/CMS is being used to correlate risk factors with the recurrence of child maltreatment. This information enables agencies to target limited resources to those families most in need.
- Conduct quality assurance reviews: By incorporating “online review” of child welfare cases as part of county compliance reviews, CDSS is able to more quickly and efficiently ensure compliance with federal and State program requirements.
- Though program management reports are comprehensive and wide-ranging, they do not meet all CWS/CMS information needs. To this end, CWS/CMS contains ad hoc reporting capabilities that allow State and county users to create and generate customized reports. The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) software allows reports to be generated from the CWS/CMS database using “real-time” information. In addition to SAS, CWS/CMS users can use Business Objects software, a more “user-friendly” database querying system. Though not “live” data like SAS, Business Objects allows users to more quickly produce ad hoc CWS/CMS reports to meet local needs.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

On December 31, 1997, CWS/CMS became fully operational in all 58 California counties and CDSS Adoption Program district offices. The system is comprised of over 300 sites within the counties, approximately 16,294 workstations, 327 servers and over 19,500 active users.

The CWS/CMS application is currently the largest statewide child welfare case management system in the United States. As of June 30, 2007, a total of 1,224,913 cases and 4,930,241 total referrals have been recorded in the system since it first became operational. Currently, there are approximately 127,625 active cases and 39,677 active referrals in the system.

The CWS/CMS application and technical platforms are designed to protect the integrity and confidentiality of the data. Almost 6,000 business rules are contained in the application to maintain data integrity and bring it into conformance with State and federal laws and regulations governing child welfare. System integrity is further maintained through an ongoing process of change control management. The goals of the original State-enabling legislation (Senate Bill 370, Statutes of 1989) relative to the establishment of a statewide information system have been met. These goals include:

- Providing child welfare staff with immediate access to child, family and case-specific information needed to make good and timely case decisions.
- Providing child welfare staff with current and accurate information to effectively and efficiently manage caseloads and to take appropriate and timely case management actions.
- Providing State and county administrators with the information needed to monitor and evaluate the achievement of program goals and to administer programs.
- Providing State and county child welfare agencies with a common database and definition of information from which to evaluate child welfare services.

- Consolidating the collection and reporting of information for child welfare programs pursuant to State and federal requirements.

Federal law and regulation requires states to collect case-level data on children in foster care and on children who have been adopted through the states' child welfare agencies. The federally mandated data system used to collect this data is called Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS). In 2006, CDSS assumed responsibility for the coding and submission of the federal AFCARS report. The overall view of the system suggests that it is meeting the primary goal of providing a statewide case management tool to enable social workers to meet the safety and service needs of children.

CHALLENGES

- Areas identified as needing continuing improvements under the current maintenance and operations system include:
 - Software and hardware upgrades to improve access from the field (remote accessibility) and to streamline data input to give staff more time to work with children and families.
 - Making the system faster, more intuitive, and consistent with changing program requirements.
 - Complexity and timeliness of federal and State approval processes necessary to keep the system current with legislative and regulatory program changes and technology advances.
 - Lack of interface between State and court data systems.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The assessment of CWS/CMS strengths, gaps, needs and usefulness is based on a review of system implementation to date, discussion with the CWS/CMS Oversight Committee, and input by users obtained through interviews and focus groups participating in the CWS/CMS strategic planning process. Continuous feedback is also obtained through monthly regional meetings among State, county and contractor staff. Input is received from State and county social workers, administrators, supervisors, program managers, support staff and researchers. The strengths of California's statewide information system include:
 - Immediate and easier access to case history, previous referrals and information from other counties.
 - Capacity for information storage and retrieval.
 - Standard documentation formats.
 - Navigation and training tools.
 - Search, case tracking and monitoring capability.
 - Ability to generate caseload statistics, demographic data, compliance and outcome data via management and ad hoc data reports.
 - Application server availability is 99.9%.
 - Reduction in the time and effort required to document cases and services make referrals, etc., compared to the previous paper-based documentation systems.
 - Standardized risk assessment.

The AFCARS reports are one example of improvement. In March 1998, 33 of the 103 AFCARS foster care and adoptions elements exceed the federal error tolerance rate; however, as of May 2007, only 2 of the 103 AFCARS foster care data elements exceeded the federal error tolerance rate. The two elements include Foster Care Elements #5 and #57. However, as of the 2007B submission, California just missed the 90% threshold by .21% with Element #5, Date of Most Recent Periodic Review. Element #57, Discharge Transaction Date, is compliant with the most recent submission. The State continues to work with the counties and its federal partners to ensure that federal reporting is continually improved. Since January 2004, reports based on CWS/CMS data and State and federal outcome measures have been available to counties, advocates and the public. These federal and State data reports are the baseline and primary tools used to assess program outcomes and performance. The reports are prepared and distributed on a quarterly basis. Once the quarterly reports become available, they are then provided to the County Directors and appropriate staff. After release to the counties, the reports are posted on the web within five to seven business days. The quarterly reports are published and available on the web at http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/CDSSCounty_1954.htm. These reports provide the basis for county management to focus efforts to improve program outcomes and support the allocation of staff and funding resources.

- The CDSS has been working on issues identified in the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP) relating to permanency goals. These issues include:
 - Issuance of ACIN 1-44-05 which provides instructions regarding complete, accurate and timely entry and update of CWS/CMS data.
 - Re-writing program code to correct CWS/CMS mapping errors.
 - Making coding changes to removal transaction dates.
 - Reviewing data to ensure placement dates are entered into CWS/CMS within a short time of the child being placed in a setting.
 - Correction of the placement change counter which was addressed in Release 5.5.
 - Issuance of ACIN 1-25-06 to address open placement situations.
- The CWS/CMS System utilizes a “Release Process” to effectively group, prioritize and define needed changes statewide. This release process begins with content definition at the county level with each of the five regions determining their overall priorities for pending System Change Requests (SCR). Additionally, SCRs are generated by the State Program and Policy Branches as well as the CWS/CMS Project Office. The key considerations are uniform and are as follows:
 - New federal and State legislative requirements.
 - Judicial orders.
 - Efforts to more accurately report outcome measures.

The priorities submitted to the State on a flow basis are compiled for review and recommendation by the Oversight Committee (OSC). This committee is made up of representatives from CDSS, CWDA and counties and is facilitated by CDSS. The OSC is responsible for applying the additional considerations of the CWS/CMS Strategic Plan to the priority setting of SCRs. This

process brings together a cross section of both State and county users and managers, ensuring adequate representation from small, medium and large counties. In this meeting, participants are provided with the opportunity to identify any additional SCRs or pending policy considerations for inclusion in the discussion. The CDSS Program/Policy staff review the recommended master list of prioritized system changes that are based on the key considerations listed above. The CWS/CMS Project Office staff work from this master list in building future System Releases. Numerous releases during the last seven years have resulted in improved outcomes for children as follows:

- Release 5.5 (November 2005) incorporated changes that resulted from both the PIP and Assembly Bill 636. This Release also modified data structures for continuous quality improvement. The resulting system modifications support the goal of providing complete and accurate information upon which child safety, permanency, and well-being can be effectively measured.
- Release 5.5.3 (May 2006) focused on implementation of legislative mandates from Assembly Bill 1695 which deleted the category of “Certified Licensing Pending” and added the category of Relative and Non-Relative Extended Family Member (NREFM) to the types of foster family homes requiring approval for meeting licensing standards. This Release also included changes to system usability and performance. Changes in functionality were made in portions of the application that are critical to children involved in the legal system, including tracking the court history and legal status information. Legal documents created in the application for submission to the Court are accessed in this area of functionality. The resulting system modifications support the goal of providing complete and accurate information upon which placement stability can be effectively measured.
- Release 5.5.4 (July 2006) automated the consistent application of foster family licensing standards in the approval of NREFM homes and met requirements mandated by Assembly Bill 1695 which ensures that existing California State law conforms to the federal Adoption and Safe Families (ASFA) act of 1997, the related portions of the United States Code (USC), and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The resulting system modifications support the goal of providing complete and accurate information upon which child safety and the reduction of placements in group homes or institutions can be effectively measured.
- Release 5.5.5 (January 2007) also incorporated changes resulting from both the PIP and Assembly Bill 636. This Release also included modifications to correctly handle data relating to “Safely Surrendered Babies”. Other improvements resulting from this Release are modifications to court templates, and the ability for social workers to place multiple related children into the same placement home. The resulting system modifications support the goal of providing complete and accurate information upon which placement stability can be effectively measured.

- Release 6.1 (November 2007) reflects recent policy changes governing NREFM assessments. The second phase of Assembly Bill 636 related changes were also implemented, thereby fulfilling the data requirements necessary to support the state-mandated review system. Legislation in the form of Assembly Bills 129 and 2795 that mandates changes to child welfare practices are also reflected in this Release. The resulting system modifications support upon which permanency, child safety can be effectively measured.
- Formal training, using a uniform CWS/CMS curriculum, is provided at the local level and statewide. In addition, staff members can learn independently by using the computer-based training module available on their computer desktops and can easily access the CWS/CMS web-based training. Currently, the State is working with California universities and colleges to include CWS/CMS training as part of the curriculum for social work students. The CDSS works closely with the Office of Systems Integration (OSI) on the State Project. The OSI Statewide Training Support (STS) unit develops, updates, and maintains all of the State's CWS/CMS training tools and materials. Updating and maintenance is performed on an ongoing basis and ensures that training tools and materials provide a uniform statewide view of how CWS/CMS information and data must be recorded. In addition, OSI provides Training for Trainers on the various CWS/CMS training tools. The STS unit also provides oversight of the vendor contracts for statewide classroom training and the Training Region.
- A CWS/CMS "Tune-Up" has been developed and is designed to improve the amount and accuracy of information going into CWS/CMS. The Tune-Up assists counties in identifying application and business practices to expand or to improve upon. Assistance is also available through the State to help counties create action plans to implement these improvements. The counties may request a tune-up to address any data inconsistencies/issues. Tune-ups are not exclusive to any particular county(ies). The counties welcome the technical assistance and collaboration with the State. Once a county decides to participate, CWS/CMS staff runs a series of county-specific reports from the CWS/CMS database. These reports identify amount of application use and, in some reports, determine the timeliness and/or quality of data input. The reports cover a broad range of application areas, including social worker contacts, case plan, referrals and court and supervisor approvals. County staff analyzes the Tune-Up reports with the assistance of State staff. The county identifies potential barriers to increased and/or improved system utilization and determines how to remove them. Resulting solutions may require local business practice changes, focused training efforts or application or system changes. The county develops an action plan, which includes barrier identification, a plan for removal or reduction of barriers, the time required and the intended outcomes. The county can request State assistance or facilitation at any point in the Tune-Up process, including monitoring action-plan progress.
- As of July 21, 2006, Federal and State approvals have been received to proceed with the CWS/CMS New System Project. The objective of the New System is to implement a web-based technical architecture for a CWS case management system supporting county and State program practice requirements, including data management, outcome measures and reporting solutions,

consistent with federal SACWIS requirements. This will further enhance the safety, well-being, and permanence of at-risk children by improving the ability of child welfare services (CWS) staff to provide services in an effective and efficient manner. To optimize the deployment of the counties' current business needs and meet emerging needs to facilitate effective delivery of services, the State will continue maintenance and operations of the current CWS/CMS while simultaneously building a new web-based system. The New System will improve child welfare outcome measures by:

- Improving State and county staff ability to measure program results and outcomes, make decisions, and improve service delivery.
 - Providing access to data that enables CPS workers and managers to make better decisions and improve quality of services.
 - Growing with the changing needs of CWS program (new initiatives and program models).
 - Reducing and eliminating report and data discrepancies that arise from multiple sources of the same data.
 - Providing common/equitable access to all counties for standard reports.
 - Increasing social worker field hours by providing simple Web-based access to reports and information (either remotely or through any device that has browser capabilities) that will identify needed case activity and improve social worker efficiency. The worker will spend less time navigating the system to input and extract information. The worker will not be tied to the desktop PC in the office, thereby allowing access to case information to support and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of decisions in the field.
- A flexible, easy to use and widely available data management and reporting solution will enable users to more efficiently access standard reports and information. It will also enable users to begin to ask new questions and seek new information that will drive better program results. By implementing a system that has the capability and functionality to easily interface with multiple auxiliary statewide or community systems, CWS can improve program performance holistically and integrate interdependent information to enhance case planning, evaluation and monitoring. Potential sources of data for valuable cross-program analysis include interfaces to CalWIN, C-IV, LEADER, ISAWS and MEDS7. This cross program analysis could allow counties to better identify causal relationships and lead to earlier or better service delivery to children and families in need.
 - The State has determined that the future technology direction for the CWS/CMS must be tied to the business challenge of enabling the delivery of effective services and improving outcomes for the State's at-risk children. The needs of children drive the practices of the services delivery organization and provide the target for strategic employment of technologies. While there are variations in child welfare service practices from a national and local perspective; there is agreement, and corresponding federal requirements, regarding the core outcomes to be achieved.
 - Through the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care subcommittee on Data and Analysis, the development team of the California Court Case Management System, CDSS and the AOC are collaborating to design data exchanges and data sharing protocols.

B. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

For the first CFSR, California was not in substantial conformity. Of the five items assessed for this systemic factor, Items 25 and 27 were the areas needing improvement for reasons such as a lack of parent and child participation in developing the case plan, inconsistency in documenting reasons for not filing for termination of parental rights (TPR) and not pursuing TPR unless an adoptive home for the child is identified and the pre-adoptive home demonstrates a readiness to adopt.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented to address this factor included:

- Developed requirements and competencies for child welfare workers and supervisors with the goal of strengthening case practice and provided training to child welfare and probation supervisors on good case planning practice, including involvement of all family members in case planning.
- Issued All County Information Notice (ACIN) I-64-03 and All County Letter (ACL) 05-07 clarifying that case plans require family engagement and importance of documentation of child and family involvement in the case planning process.
- Provided technical assistance to high priority counties.
- Worked with California Youth Connection (CYC) to ensure that youth voice and involvement are integrated into the case planning process.
- Expanded the time allotted to develop an appropriate case plan from 30 days to 60 days.
- Developed and implemented an educational program through CDSS' contract with JRTA to provide training to all judges on current law regarding TPR and concurrent planning.
- Utilization of the C-CFSR self-assessment and planning processes to identify and address unmet placement resource needs, including foster and adoptive parents for special needs and older children.

ITEM 25:

Written Case Plan. Does the State provide a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan, to be developed jointly with the child, when appropriate, and the child's parent(s), that includes the required provisions?

POLICY

Statutory and regulatory requirements for a written case plan have been in force in California since 1982 (Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16501.1). Since that time, the case plan requirements have been updated regularly and now exceed federal mandates.

California WIC, Sections 358.1, 706.5, 727.3, 366.1 and 366.3 require a written case plan for all open cases, whether voluntary or court-ordered, in-home or out-of-home. When the Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over the dependent child or ward, statutes require that the written case plan be part of the court report and submitted as evidence into the record initially and updated at all six-month reviews or as service and/or permanency needs indicate. Compliance with court requirements ensures the timeliness and thoroughness of the case plan.

The federally required elements of the case plan are mandated in provisions of State law and regulations (WIC, Section 16501.1 and Manual of Policies and Procedures, Division 31 Section 31-205). These provisions emphasize that “the child’s health and safety shall be the paramount concern” and require that the plan be based on the child and family’s assessment. Required elements of the plan include:

- specific goals and appropriate planned services to meet those goals;
- a description of services offered and provided to prevent removal of the child;
- a description of the planned frequency of child-parent contacts;
- provisions for the development and maintenance of sibling relationships;
- a schedule of social worker/probation placement officer contacts with the child, parents and the child’s caregivers;
- a description of the parental participation in the development of the case plan;
- selection of a safe and appropriate placement that is least restrictive, most family like, in close proximity to the parental home whenever possible and best suited to meet the child’s special needs and best interest
- a summary of the health and educational records, status and needs of the child;
- when the goal is reunification, a description of the services provided concurrently to achieve legal permanency if reunification fails; and,
- a description of services needed to assist youth age 16 or older to make the transition from foster care to independent living (WIC, Section 366.3).

Assembly Bill 1412 (Chapter 640, Statutes of 2005) provides for a greater degree of participation by the child in the development of the case plan. A child’s rights under section 16001.9(a) include the right “...to be involved in the development of his or her case plan and plan for permanent placement...” and the right “...to review his or her own case plan and plan for permanent placement if he or she is 12 years of age or older and in a permanent placement, and to receive information about his or her out-of-home placement and case plan, including being told of changes to the plan.” A provision was also added as section 16501.1(f)(12) requiring that in the development of the case plan a child “...be given a meaningful opportunity to participate in the development of the case plan ...(and) a child who is 12 years of age or older and in a permanent placement shall also be given the opportunity to review the case plan, sign the case plan, and receive a copy of the case plan.”

The initial and subsequent case plans are incorporated into the court reports and reviewed and considered by all parties such as the child’s attorney, the mother’s and father’s attorneys and any court-appointed child advocate (WIC, Sections 358 and 358.1). The reasonableness and efficacy of the recommended services are reviewed and modified as needed, and the court may make any and all reasonable orders including enjoining service providers to coordinate and collaborate in service delivery (WIC, Section 362).

As a result of the first PIP, Assembly Bill 2795 (Chapter 332, Statutes of 2004) was enacted to allow up to 60 days for completion of an initial case plan. Extending the time for development of the case plan from 30 days to 60 days, at county option, allows more time to engage the child and parents in the process.

PRACTICE

- California has an automated case plan process for documentation of each individual service offered or provided to parents and the parents' progress completing the services identified in the case plan. The automated case plan process is not available for Probation.
- The additional time allowed for completion case plans, results in increased use of best practices such as family engagement, multi-disciplinary teams and mediation.

Every parent and child is provided a court-appointed attorney who advocates for their due process rights to reasonable services that are required based on substantiated allegations.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Processes and regulations are in place to ensure that State and federal requirements are met. Specifically, front-line managers and supervisors review and approve completed case plans within 30-60 days of the child's removal and monitor timely completion of the initial plan and subsequent updates.

In addition, automated management reports allow the county supervisor and office manager to closely monitor each worker's progress in case plan completion and documentation. Use of quality assurance tools such as Safe Measures, Business Objects and other tools allow the county supervisor and the case worker to monitor their compliance with the initial case plan development and subsequent updates.

As part of the PIP, California was required to demonstrate improvement in the percent of children, parents and caregivers that were involved in case planning. Through a series of surveys, this was measured in three ways:

- The percentage of interviewees who reported the children, parents and caregivers were involved in case planning (baseline: 90.9%).
- The percentage of interviewees that reported the case plan was discussed with them (baseline: 89.6%).
- The percentage of interviewees that reported the case plan was discussed with them and the child (baseline: 50.7%).

California met the PIP improvement targets for each of these measures.

CHALLENGES

- Balancing workload, staffing issues and community resource limitations create challenges to meeting case plan timelines.
- Probation lacks an automated system, and does not currently have access to the CWS/CMS system, to document a service plan which creates a void for data collection and monitoring.
- Parents are sometimes reluctant to engage in case planning or to sign the initial case plan before the court sustains the allegations in the petition, which often delays the completion of the case plan in both in-home and foster care cases.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- As of December 2006, 24 of the 25 Family to Family counties had rolled out Team Decision Making for targeted areas or populations. Many counties have implemented other similar processes such as Family Group Conferencing and Family Group Decision Making with the goal of involving parents, child/youth, extended family members and others in the case planning process.
- A number of counties have implemented parent partner programs. This approach pairs parents who have successfully reunified with their children, with families who are newly involved in the child welfare system. The goal is to help parents navigate the system, learn how to advocate for themselves and help them become active participants in their case plan. All 35 counties implementing Wraparound are required to establish a family/parent partner program.
- Safe Measures, Business Objects and other quality assurance tools are utilized by many counties to extract data from CWS/CMS. This information tracks initial and updated case plans throughout the life of the case and allows supervisors and social workers to monitor case plan compliance as well as track outcomes.

ITEM 26:

Periodic Reviews. Does the State provide a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review?

POLICY

California's state laws, regulations and court rules, as well as on-going training programs were developed to ensure compliance with the federal requirement for timely and complete case reviews.

In accordance with WIC, the court reviews evidence about the child's safety and makes determinations on all required ASFA elements at the dispositional hearing. WIC, Sections 366, 366.21, 366.3, 11400 and 11404 stipulate that the court must hold subsequent periodic status review hearings no less frequently than every six months from the date of the original dispositional hearing. As required by WIC, Section 360, ASFA determinations are reviewed at each subsequent hearing for the life of the case. As mandated in WIC, Section 727.3, for delinquency cases, the date the child entered foster care triggers the first periodic case plan review, which continues every six months until the termination of the case.

In dependency cases, for each review prior to the 12-month permanency review hearing and for subsequent reviews, at least annually, the court must conduct a status review hearing of the permanent plan. Subsequent to the permanency review, statutes permit administrative hearings to be conducted for the six-month status reviews between the annual permanency review court hearings. However, if the permanent plan is adoption or legal guardianship, only the court can conduct the subsequent permanency reviews (WIC, Section 366.3). In delinquency cases, status

review hearings may be heard by administrative panels; however, none of the counties in California currently hold administrative review hearings in delinquency cases (WIC, Section 727.3).

California law (WIC, Section 352) and Rules of Court (Rule 5.550) require that continuances not be granted when they are contrary to the child's best interest, but only be granted upon a showing of good cause. The statute emphasizes the child's need for prompt resolution of his or her custody status, the need to provide children with a stable environment and the need to reduce the damage to a child due to prolonged temporary placements.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

California strives to have fewer continuances and to move children quickly to permanency. One measure of this is the proportion of children who exited to adoption and did so within 24 months. The most recent data for the quarter ending September 2006 indicates that California has improved to 30.3 percent from a baseline of 18 percent in 2002, indicating a steady improvement in the measure.

According to State Data Profile, the median time to exit for adoption and reunification has been declining, indicating timely court review processes.

PRACTICE

- In California, social workers/probation placement officers prepare progress reports for submission to the court at six month intervals following the dispositional hearing. These reports include information on the child's health, education, and social functioning as well as progress on the parents' efforts to achieve the case plan goals.
- The social worker/probation placement officer also makes recommendations to the court regarding the continuation of the case plan. These reports, along with any evidence presented by all other parties, such as the Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteer or the caregiver, serve as the basis for the courts decisions to extend the reunification process, terminate services to parents, or change permanency goals.

CHALLENGES

- Although clear statutory timeframes exist for dependency cases, at times, California's commitment to due process for parents in the child welfare system presents a challenge to meeting these timeframes. Though necessary to ensure the constitutional rights of the parties, court continuances are the principal barrier to meeting the timeframes. It is recognized that workload contributes to this issue.
- Judges rely on timely and accurate reports from social workers to inform their decisions. When these reports are late or incomplete judges are unable to render decisions which delay the permanency process.
- When tribal involvement in court proceedings is not initiated early in cases, permanency can be delayed.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- In order to address the issue of continuances more successfully, California provides judicial officers and court clerks with specialized training on dependency and delinquency cases. Several State agencies and associations provide such training, including the Judicial Council's Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER) and the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC). The CJER holds annual institutes and produces judicial bench guides on each juvenile court hearing that discuss the strict statutory timelines in juvenile law.
- The CFCC's Court Improvement Project (CIP) is entering into an interagency agreement with CDSS to use the CFSR data resources to provide data on safety and permanency outcomes for children specifically to judicial officers to further their involvement in the state's Outcomes and Accountability process. The CIP staff is also coordinating the input of CDSS and CWS/CMS designers into the upcoming California Court Case Management System to align data elements, reduce duplication, enhance information sharing and follow a common plan for performance measurement.
- Using a process designed by the Judicial Council's CFCC, local courts are encouraged to assess their dependency policies and operations around the key topics identified by the 2005 *Dependency Court Improvement Program Reassessment* as deficiencies or areas in need of further study. The self-assessment tools—modeled on tools developed by CFCC's Domestic Violence Safety Partnership (DVSP) program—will include sections for assessing compliance with state and federal mandates, as well as adherence to best practice standards from the *Resource Guidelines* and elsewhere. The CDSS' role in the project is to offer technical assistance as requested, as well as having a staff member from CDSS as a part of the small working group.
- Through a contract with CDSS, technical assistance regarding ASFA compliance and other legal issues is offered to judges, child welfare staff, and probation department staff by the Administrative Office of the Courts' Judicial Review and Technical Assistance program (JRTA).
- The Dependency Drug Courts (DDC) is another collaboration that monitors families who are involved with the child welfare system and for whom substance abuse is a significant issue. Since 2004, CDSS has provided technical assistance and staff support to the Judicial Council's Collaborative Justice Advisory Committee and to local efforts to test and disseminate these practices. With the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, CDSS is planning the next phases of DDC expansion and evaluation of prospective data. Currently there are 31 counties with Dependency Drug Courts in California and approximately 20 additional counties will be funded under the expansion.-
- Another collaborative effort is the California Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care. The Commission began meeting in 2006 to study one of the most critical issues facing the justice system – the need to quickly secure safe and permanent homes for California's children. Appointed by Chief Justice Ronald M. George, the representative Commission, chaired by California Supreme Court Justice Carlos R. Moreno, is made up of judges (including a tribal

judge), legislators, attorneys, and representatives from CDSS, county social services and probation representatives, former foster youth, community leaders and others. They are exploring the causes and consequences of court-based delays and are in the process of making recommendations on how to improve the ability of courts to move children quickly out of foster care and into permanency.

- Effective December 2005, CDSS entered into an interagency agreement with the Judicial Council's CFCC to create the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Initiative. This initiative provides targeted training and technical assistance in order to increase knowledge of ICWA by making available a range of facilitation and training services through cross-disciplinary regional and locally targeted trainings for judicial officers, clerks, attorneys, social workers and probation officers. This ICWA Initiative seeks to promote improved implementation of the Indian Child Welfare Act.

ITEM 27:

Permanency Hearings. Does the State provide a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date that the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter?

POLICY

Pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Section 366.21, the permanency hearing must be held no later than twelve months after the date the child entered foster care. At the permanency hearing, the court must determine the permanent plan for the child, which must include a determination of whether the child will be returned to the child's home and if so, when.

The commitment to early permanency for very young children was reflected in statutory changes made in 1996 to limit the period of reunification services to six months for children under the age of three years (WIC, Section 361.5). In such cases, the permanency hearing may be held at six months after the child entered foster care.

Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 366.26 provides for a permanency review hearing six months after the permanency hearing and provides for permanency review hearing every six months thereafter.

In order to achieve permanency for children in long-term foster care, reunification, as well as adoption or guardianship, must be reconsidered at each review hearing.

PRACTICE

- Adoption must be considered at every review hearing following the termination of reunification. At the review hearing, an action to terminate parental rights is initiated or a compelling reason to maintain parental rights is documented.

- All case plans for foster children (including those under the probation department's purview) who are being reunified must have a concurrent plan for permanency. As counties implemented concurrent planning, they developed a variety of system reforms to ensure that permanency planning begins at the point of removal.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

In 1998, California modified statutes to conform to ASFA and to ensure that the permanency hearing is held within 12 months of the date the child entered foster care. Previously, this hearing was held at 18 months from removal. This statutory modification blends into a series of changes California had already made to expedite permanency for very young children, to integrate concurrent planning into its practice, to streamline the adoption process and to encourage relatives to either adopt or become legal guardians. Permanency hearings work in concert with other program requirements to ensure that children in foster care have the maximum opportunity to achieve permanency. In the majority of cases timely permanency hearings are held.

California has a clear commitment to achieving timely and appropriate permanency for foster children. The measure used in the PIP regarding the rate of timely establishment of appropriate permanency goals following termination of family reunification services increased from 67.4 percent in 2002 to 70.4 percent in 2005. Through a series of statutory changes and extensive training of child welfare and probation staff and juvenile court bench officers, the State has made permanency for all foster children its guiding principle.

CHALLENGES

- Timing for the permanency hearing can be affected when the adjudication process is delayed or extended, and/or reunification efforts are extended by the court.
- Subsequent permanency hearings should be held at 12 month intervals. If the tracking system for regular court appearance isn't sufficient, hearings will not occur at the appropriate intervals.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The JRTA program (as described earlier) helps courts focus on timeliness of court hearings. The JRTA program also provided technical assistance to the ten largest counties on termination of parental rights and concurrent planning. A video was developed of this training to be used by other counties.
- The CDSS, has worked with the California Department of Mental Health (DMH), the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP), County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC), the associations representing the county mental health directors, alcohol and drug program directors (Proposition 36 funding), and the local county First 5 Association and the State First 5 Commission to ensure that children and families in the California child welfare services system receive the appropriate priority for services across systems.

ITEM 28:

Termination of Parental Rights. Does the State provide a process for Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)?

POLICY

California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) 366.21 requires that action to terminate parental rights (TPR) must be initiated at the permanency hearing held 12 months after the child entered foster care, unless a compelling reason not to do so exists. At the 12 month hearing, a date is set for the selection and implementation (366.26) hearing, at which time, TPR occurs or another permanent plan is selected. Senate Bill 678, effective January 1, 2007, expanded WIC, Section 366.26(f) to specify when TPR is not in the child's best interest: (1) the TPR would interfere with the child's connection to his/her tribal community, or the child's membership rights; or (2) the child's tribe identifies an alternative permanent plan.

According to WIC, Section 361.5, at the time of the dispositional hearing, the court may forgo reunification services in any one of 16 exceptional circumstances. These circumstances include parents who are convicted of certain felonies or infants who have been abandoned prior to terminating parental rights. If family reunification is not ordered because of such exceptional circumstances or because reunification efforts have failed, then adoption, including TPR, becomes the primary case plan goal, unless a compelling reason to the contrary is documented.

Assembly Bill 519 (codified as WIC, Section 366.26(i)(2)) enacted in 2005, allows for the reinstatement of parental rights in certain cases. A child, whose parental rights were terminated, who has not been adopted after the passage of three years from the date the court terminated parental rights, and for whom the court has determined that adoption is no longer the permanent plan, can petition the court to have their parental rights re-instated.

PRACTICE

- Exceptions or compelling reasons why TPR is not in the best interest of the child is included in social workers'/probation placement officers' assessment for the 366.26 hearing and is addressed in every subsequent court report. Additionally, the court must find and order that there is a compelling reason why TPR is not in the best interest of the child.
- Adoption is considered at every hearing after the termination of reunification so the reason for not terminating parental rights can be reassessed to see if they still accurately reflect the best interests of the child. If the reasons still exists then they are documented anew.
- Upon the court order to terminate parental rights, an appeal may be filed using the traditional appeal process. In this process the appellant and the appellant's attorney must file a signed notice of appeal within 60 days of the court order.

- The CDSS contracts with the Consortium for Children to provide permanency planning mediation services to children whose parents are contesting an adoption plan or for youth who are opposing an adoption plan. These services are geared toward establishing agreement on a permanent plan and most often results in a post adoption contact agreement between the adoptive parents and birth family members. An estimated 1,000 children are served per year in which 80 percent of mediation families agree to withdraw their challenge to the termination of parental rights. This process frees the child sooner for adoption.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

California met the PIP target of decreasing the proportion of children in care for 17 of the most recent 22 months without a TPR by 2 percent. The target for Item 28 was 87.5 percent. As of the 4th quarter of 2005 and the 1st quarter of 2006, the trend for this measure was a continuation of the decrease, with the 1st quarter of 2006 at 84.9 percent. However, for the 2nd and 3rd quarters of 2006 the measure increased to 90.3 percent for the 3rd quarter of 2006. The CDSS is concerned about this more recent trend and will analyze the data as well as continue to monitor the measure. Unfortunately, this measure does not account for children for whom a compelling reason is found for not terminating parental rights.

CHALLENGES

- The noticing process for birthparents for the TPR is more rigorous than for other hearings and often results in time delays for the TPR hearing. Implementation of the permanent plan is delayed when parents appeal the TPR decision.
- Increased recruitment and training of adoptive families is necessary, especially to meet the needs of older youth and special needs children awaiting adoption. A greater number of adoptive families are expected to increase the likelihood that children and youth will be placed sooner in a family prepared to adopt them.
- In some jurisdictions when an adoptive family has not yet been identified, social workers may be reluctant to recommend TPR, and courts may be reluctant to terminate parental rights. This reluctance is based on the desire not to create legal orphans should children whose parental rights have been terminated, not be adopted. As a result, many children are living with the family that will adopt them by the time parental rights are terminated.
- In an attempt to balance the due process rights of parents with children's need for permanence, there may be delays. In making a decision to terminate parental rights, every factor must be weighted to ensure decisions are made through a thoughtful, comprehensive, and well-supported process and not made in haste. This creates the need for continuances in the process of termination of parental rights, but ultimately helps to avoid a judgment or court ordered being overturned.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Assembly Bill 1808, enacted in 2006, provides funding for a pilot project in four counties and a CDSS district office to provide pre-adoption and post-adoption services to ensure the successful adoption of children over the age of 9 years old, who have been in foster care for more than 18 months, and are not placed with a relative. Funding is devoted to help identify adoptive families and provide supportive services to create and maintain successful adoption. Additionally, the California Permanency for Youth Project is working in 14 counties to enhance permanency services to youth in foster care.
- Family finding approaches are being utilized to search for relatives, non-related extended family members, and people youth identify as important. Through the sharing of information about different web search services and tools, counties are finding greater success at locating individuals that could mentor, make a lifelong commitment, assume placement, and/or adopt children and youth in foster care.

ITEM 29:

Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers. Does the State provide a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child?

POLICY

Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Sections 366.21(b), 727.4 and 16503 require agencies to notify the child's caregiver of all six month case review hearings and that the notice of the hearing be mailed by the social worker/probation placement officer to the foster parents, relative caregivers, pre-adoptive parents, community care facility or the foster family agency having physical custody of the child. Similar notice is required for any administrative review convened in lieu of a court hearing. A new rule of court (described below) requires notice be provided to caregivers for all review and permanency hearings.

Welfare and Institutions Code, Sections 366.21(b) and 727.4 also require notice to the child's caregiver in addition to the notice provided to the child's parent(s) or legal guardian, the counsels of record and the child over the age of 10 years. This written notice informs the caregiver of the date, time and place of the hearing; the nature of the hearing; and, any change in the custody or status of the child. This notice advises the foster parent, relative caregiver and pre-adoptive parent that they may attend all hearings or may submit any information deemed relevant to the court, in writing.

California WIC Code, Section 366.21(c) requires in addition to the written notice, the social worker/probation placement officer must, at least 10 calendar days prior to the hearing, "provide a summary of recommendations for disposition" to the child's attorney, any court-appointed child advocate, foster parents, relative caregivers or pre-adoptive parents.

Although California law does not grant standing to the child's caregiver, the caregiver may submit a written report to the court. The law states that prior to the hearing, the community care facility or foster family agency is required to file a report with the court about its care of the child and the "facility's or agency's recommendation for disposition." The court is required to consider these reports and recommendations prior to a dispositional decision.

In January 2002, the Judicial Council of California implemented a Caregiver Information Form (JV-290) for optional use by caregivers who wish to submit information to the juvenile court. The form is intended to provide caregivers with a structured format in which to present the information. Law requires social workers to provide this form to caregivers.

Effective October 1, 2007, a new rule of court (rule 5.534(m)) went into effect, which requires the court to ensure notice be provided of all review, permanency and 366.26 hearings to the current caregiver of the child, including foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, relative caregivers and non-relative extended family members. The rule clarifies that these caregivers have a right to be heard in each of these proceedings. The rule also describes the procedures for social workers/probation placement officers to provide the summary of recommendations, caregiver form, and instructions to the caregivers, for the caregivers to file the form or a letter with the court, and for the court clerk's office to distribute the completed caregiver form to the court and all parties to the case. A revised version of the Caregiver Information form, and new instructions for completing and filing the form also went into effect on October 1, 2007.

Senate Bill 703 will become effective on January 1, 2008, and will also conform California law to the noticing requirements of the federal Safe and Timely Interstate Placement Act of 2006. Welfare and Institutions Codes have been amended to include notification to current caregivers of their right to be heard.

PRACTICE

- To ensure a meaningful implementation of the "notice and right to be heard" provisions for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers under the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, the Judicial Council of California, Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) implemented the Caregivers and the Courts Program. Its purpose is to ensure that information from caregivers about dependent children's needs is available to judicial officers for the court decision-making process.
- Federal and California state law gives foster parents (including pre-adoptive parents) and relatives caring for children the right to be heard in court, subject to certain restrictions. In order to participate effectively in the court process, caregivers need to understand the different legal issues judges face at court hearings, how to assess whether information is appropriate for the court process and how best to present the information to the court.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

California's newly enacted rule of court and legislation meets the requirement for a process to provide notice to foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers of juvenile court hearings of a child in their care and of their right to be heard. For over two decades, statutes have required that notice of case review hearings be provided to foster parents, as well as a copy of the agency's recommendations and advisement of the opportunity to attend or submit a written report. The child's caregivers are routinely provided written notice of the hearings but do not always attend these hearings.

CHALLENGES

- Foster parents and relative caregivers are sometimes reluctant to attend court hearings because they don't understand their roles and are intimidated by the process.
- Stakeholders reported foster parents and relative caregivers are often unable to attend court hearings because of work schedules and the lack of child care resources.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The State has engaged in significant efforts to further reach out to relatives and foster parents and to assist them in understanding their role in court, which may improve the frequency and quality of caregivers' participation in the court process. An example of reaching out to caregivers is the use of parent partner programs as described earlier.
- Beyond the Bench is an annual nationally acclaimed, multidisciplinary conference sponsored by the CFCC that brings together over 1100 juvenile dependency and delinquency professionals from around the state. Judicial officers, attorneys, court administrators, social workers, CASAs, probation officers, educators, mental health professionals and others come together to learn about the latest research and best practices with regard to improving juvenile justice and child abuse and neglect proceedings. Training for social workers and attorneys will enable them to make the best use of caregiver information.
- The creation of a standardized form by Judicial Council (JV-290) for use by foster parents and relative caregivers is an important improvement in formalizing a process to ensure the caregivers have an easy and clearly understood mechanism for input. This form has been utilized since 2002 and was updated in 2007 to include a place for caregivers to offer their recommendation for disposition to the court. The creation of an instruction sheet, which social workers are required to provide to parents along with the JV-290 form, is anticipated to increase the number of caregivers who are filing the form and participating in court hearings for the children in their care.

C. QUALITY ASSURANCE:

For the first CFSR, California was not in substantial conformity. Of the two items comprising this systemic factor, Item 31 was an area needing improvement because the State's previous quality assurance process did not assess the effectiveness and quality of services delivered. The strategy implemented for Program Improvement Plan (PIP) was the development of the Assembly Bill 636 Outcomes and Accountability process.

ITEM 30:

Standards Ensuring Quality Services. Has the State developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children?

POLICY

California has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their safety and health. These standards exist largely on two levels. The first level and set of standards relates to statewide regulations pertaining to foster care licensing, relative approval, and licensing for residential and group home care. These regulations are more fully discussed in Items 41-43.

The second level of standards for ensuring quality services are defined at the county level. Each county child welfare agency in California has a set of standards by which they select agencies to provide necessary services to children and their families. These standards are related to qualifications of agency staff in relation to services provided to child welfare clients, availability of licensed staff when applicable, non-discrimination policies, background checks of staff, cultural competence, fiscal and budgetary competence, evidence of collaboration with other agencies, as well as other factors deemed as priorities by individual counties.

PRACTICE

See Items 41-43 below.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

See Items 41-43 below.

CHALLENGES

- Historically, service providers contracting with child welfare agencies in California have not been focused on an outcomes-based approach to service delivery. Programs were often evaluated internally and externally in terms of the accessibility of services and the numbers and/or hours of services provided rather than on measures of quality or effectiveness.
- Although group home use in California is declining, it has been difficult for the state to consistently monitor the quality of group home services due to the number of group homes and lack of available state staff.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Counties are providing training and funding for agencies to enable them to make the shift between process measures and outcome measures for the child welfare clients they serve.
- In an effort to facilitate the use of evidence-based practice to improve outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being, CDSS funded the development and implementation of the California Child Welfare Evidence Based Clearinghouse in 2004. It serves as an online resource by providing up-to-date information on evidence-based child welfare practices related to serving families involved in public child welfare system. The “Pathway to Prevention” tool has also been developed to provide findings from research, practice, theory, and policy about what it takes to improve the lives of children and families. It emphasizes acting strategically across disciplines, systems, and jurisdictions to reduce abuse and neglect.
- The Children’s Residential Regulation Review Workgroup, established in 2006, has completed a review of all foster care regulations. The recommendations from this workgroup have been utilized to draft new regulations which will help provide youth with a more “normal home environment” and allow them to develop self sufficiency skills as they transition into adulthood from the foster care system.
- The CFSD Operations Bureau analyzes internal data reports and Safe Measures for those counties operating below target indicators (e.g. Social Worker visits); the CFSD’s Deputy Director in turn responds directly to those counties. The Operations Bureau provides technical assistance to counties to improve specific outcomes.

ITEM 31:

Quality Assurance System. Is the State operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented?

POLICY

Pursuant to Assembly Bill 636, effective January 2004, a new CHILD WELFARE SERVICES OUTCOME AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM began operation in California. The new system, referred to as the California-Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), was developed in accordance with the provisions of Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Section 10601.2 and focuses primarily on measuring outcomes in Safety, Permanence and Child and Family Well-Being.

Assembly Bill 636, mandated the development and implementation of a new Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System that meets the IV-B Plan Quality Assurance System requirements. This new comprehensive system is the primary tool for State program oversight and places an emphasis on continuous quality improvement. The California system contains similar features to the federal Child and Family Services Review oversight system and is called the California-Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR). The C-CFSR was designed to be compatible with federal reporting and future federal reviews.

The Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act shifted California away from a process-based accountability system — focused only on whether a child received a particular service or a certain action was taken — toward a cycle of continuous improvement focused on achieving results related to safety, permanence and well-being. The new accountability system replaces the former Child Welfare Services Oversight System which focused exclusively on regulatory compliance and brings California's oversight into alignment with the Federal Child and Family Services Review oversight system of the states.

California's new accountability system is built on an open and continuously recurring three-year cycle of self-assessment, planning, implementation and review. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data is fundamental to this cycle. The quantitative data comes from Child Welfare Services/Case Management System, the statewide child welfare database. The qualitative data is drawn from reviews of individual cases within each county. Key components are: quarterly county data reports, peer quality case reviews, county self-assessments, and county system improvement plans.

By June 2007, all 58 counties had completed an entire cycle of peer quality case review, self-assessment, and system improvement plans. In addition to this system, the State has other processes in place as described below.

California WIC, Section 16503 requires each county to develop and implement processes, procedures and standards for the conduct of administrative reviews for foster placements. Manual of Policies and Procedures, Division 31 regulations direct counties to develop grievance procedures to review complaints from foster parents, legal parents, guardians and children concerning the placement or removal of a child from a foster home.

At the State level, the FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE (FCO) is established by Senate Bill 933 (Chapter 311, Statutes of 1998) as "...an autonomous entity within the department..." This autonomy was necessary for current and former foster youth and those who care about them to have an objective forum for resolution of complaints and concerns regarding their care, placement and services. While there is no requirement that counties establish a FCO, fourteen counties have established an "Ombudsman-like" office to address complaints and concerns. The counties are Alameda, Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Solano. The FCO refers complaints regarding investigations to the County Ombudsman, Community Care Licensing and the County Child Abuse Hot Lines, when appropriate. The FCO staff follows up with the complainant and the referral organization to verify resolution. The FCO staff conducts the investigation in all counties where there is not a County Ombudsman. The FCO also hosts quarterly meetings of all the County Ombudsman to discuss their issues and coordination of complaint processing. Five counties (Contra Costa, Lassen, Madera, San Bernardino, Siskiyou) have identified a specific contact person that Ombudsman staff notify when a complaint regarding their county has been received, however the FCO staff conducts those investigations. The FCO protocols also require Ombudsman staff to "notify" the Child's Attorney regarding a complaint involving the child.

The STATE FAIR HEARINGS PROCESS as required by WIC, Section 1950 allows an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) to conduct informal administrative hearings, evaluate evidence, issue subpoenas if necessary, make evidentiary findings, research applicable law and prepare decisions. ALJs may issue final decisions on behalf of the Director or submit proposed decisions for the Director's consideration. The Director may adopt the proposed decision, issue a Director's alternate decision or order a further hearing. Released decisions are binding unless overturned by judicial review. Hearing parties may request a re-hearing if dissatisfied with a released decision. State Fair Hearing decisions are intended to benefit the child. The State Fair Hearing process has been in place since the early 1970's. It has served as a means of assuring program integrity because it enforces a strict interpretation of all guiding rules and regulations.

PRACTICE

- California's quality assurance system was addressed in the 2002-2005 PIP. The primary strategy included in California's PIP was a decision to develop and fully implement a new outcomes based quality assurance system. The resulting system, the C-CFSR, operates on a philosophy of continuous quality improvement requiring each county child welfare service agency and juvenile probation department to complete the required elements on a triennial basis. The components are:
 - The use of quarterly county data reports by the state and by the counties serves as the foundation for the C-CFSR. These reports contain a series of measures that provide indicators of key program outcomes, processes, and receipt of critical services. The reports are used by counties and state staff to track improvements in strategies established in their system improvement plans and to support continuous high performance in outcome areas. The outcome measures are consistent with federal CFSR measures and are used to track State and county performance over time. Quarterly county data reports are developed using data extracted by the State's SACWIS system (CWS/CMS) and are published by CDSS in partnership with the University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research. These data reports serve to increase public awareness of the local child welfare system and establish the county's accountability for improving outcomes for children and families.
 - The peer quality case review (PQCR) provides opportunities for examining the county child welfare system through a focused area of social work practice. While the quantitative data provides integral, population-based information, the PQCR provides a rich and deep understanding of actual practices in the field. PQCR goes beyond the county self-assessment process by bringing in outside expertise, such as county child welfare, probation peers, and community stakeholders to shed light on the strengths and areas needing improvement of county child welfare service delivery and practices. It is an intensive examination of selected social work/probation practice areas aimed at improving the provision of child welfare services. Child welfare and probation staff have an opportunity to freely and honestly provide insight and practice wisdom for improving the provision of child welfare services.
 - The County Self Assessment (CSA) is a multidisciplinary needs assessment which identifies county strengths and challenges, details the county's overall best practice, service delivery, and funding streams, and evaluates current needs of the county. The CSA emphasizes increased collaboration with local tribes, community-based organizations, courts, and the

county probation department. The intent of the self-assessment is for counties to examine all program areas to determine the basis for their current level of performance and to help them identify and remove barriers to improving performance. This includes using community-based groups to facilitate public input into the process. Each county conducts an assessment once every three years and is required to have the Board of Supervisor's approval.

- The county system improvement planning process incorporates the data that counties are collecting through their data reviews, case reviews, and self assessments and translate their understanding of this information into strategic planning for program improvement. Commonly known as SIPS, these County System Improvement Plans must be developed in partnership with the community and other county agencies. Another significant impact of this new process is the forging of relationships with the larger community and the development of greater community understanding about what goes on inside the child welfare agency in its efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. Further engagement of the community in planning for the adoption of specific improvement strategies reinforces the importance to the child welfare agency of the input and perspective of other stakeholders in the child welfare system. Each county SIP is an operational agreement between the State and county. For those outcome indicators which the county performance is determined to be below the statewide standard, the SIP must include milestones, timeframes, and proposed improvement goals the county must achieve.
 - The Safe Measures program provides State staff and county child welfare managers with an ability to identify specific areas needing improvement and the opportunity to identify specific cases not in compliance for the local agency. With Safe Measures, managing performance shifts from using data based on limited randomized samples, to an analysis of data from CWS/CMS for all cases in near real-time (reports are updated and refreshed twice each week). Among its many features, reports interactively display performance trends over time to gauge improvement and comparisons across the agency to determine consistency of service delivery. Social workers, supervisors, and managers connect with the data entered into CWS/CMS as they use the Safe Measures tool to identify problem cases before they turn into negative outcomes. For every report, Safe Measures drill-down display lists both compliant and non-compliant cases for each of the most recent 13 months. The user may investigate the service history of any listed case by simply clicking on a case to view a comprehensive, chronological summary of activities, plans and assessments. The case history is useful for routine case review as well as the PQCR process.
- The CDSS uses Safe Measures for technical assistance to all 58 counties. Forty-nine counties have Safe Measures available on an ongoing basis. For the nine counties who have not subscribed to the service, CDSS has arranged to make it available to them during their Peer Quality Case Review to assist in identifying their focus area and cases to be reviewed.
- The Foster Care Ombudsman Office (FCO) as described earlier has an established a case tracking system that is used to compile yearly data and to prepare reports which are posted on the FCO website www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov. This data informs CDSS and the public about activities of the FCO. Services provided by the Foster Care Ombudsman Office include:

- Maintaining a toll-free telephone number (877-846-1602) which foster children and youth, and concerned citizens may call to express their complaints or to receive information.
- Maintaining a comprehensive database to track all calls, which provides statistics on the number of calls, type of calls, referrals and other data received by the FCO, as mandated by law.
- Providing an independent forum for the investigation and resolution of complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care and make appropriate referrals, so that foster children and youth can file complaints without fear of retaliation.
- Providing children and youth, caregivers and child welfare professionals with information on the rights of foster children. The FCO has created outreach materials including brochures in English and Spanish, laminated cards about the FCO, posters, and fact sheets on legislation relevant to foster care issues.
- Maintaining the Foster Youth Help website www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov which provides information on the FCO program as well as a wide range of resources to assist foster youth, providers, and the general public. The site includes information on resources regarding employment, education, housing, legislation and foster youth rights.
- Facilitating the Foster Care Ombudsman Advisory Committee which is composed of representatives from children's advocacy organizations, provider organizations, various state departments, county child welfare agencies, county probation departments, county ombudsman, and current and former foster youth. The committee meets annually to offer feedback on services and provide recommendations for improving the functioning of the FCO.

For example, the work of this committee led to the development and passage of the Foster Youth Rights bills.

The following tables summarize the number of complaints received, complaint type and reporting party.

Table A: Calls Received

Year	Total Calls	Complaint Calls	Other Complaints	Requests for Information
May 2004-May 2005	1,620	861	30	729
May 2005- May 2006	1,565	937	18	610

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Year	Total Calls	Complaint Calls	Other Complaints	Requests for Information
May 2004-May 2005	1,620	861	30	729
May 2005- May 2006	1,565	937	18	610

The Foster Care Ombudsman staff has aided callers to resolve their differences with public officials since it was established in 2000. Given the nature of the Ombudsman program, every attempt is made to resolve complaints voluntarily and informally. When complaints are outside the authority of the FCO, appropriate referrals are made. This valuable program provides an important voice for CDSS to continue its efforts to improve practice and assists the State in quality assurance at the level of meeting and communicating directly with any foster child in his or her placement and addressing concerns from relatives, professionals and the general public.

As the FCO recognizes patterns regarding the types of complaints, feedback is given to policy makers regarding recommendations for specific improvements in the child welfare system. The Foster Care Ombudsman staff facilitates and participates in various state-level and county-level policy and program development taskforces including the following:

- The FCO facilitates the Foster Youth Employment, Training and Housing Taskforce, which focuses on developing and expanding opportunities for foster youth to have employment and training and supportive housing. This taskforce is a collaboration between CDSS, Employment Development Department, Workforce Investment Board, Casey Family Programs, Child Welfare Directors Associations, Community Colleges, New Ways to Work, Connected by 25 and other community partners. This taskforce has been active in the development of Independent Living Program (ILP) regulations that require all ILP programs to enroll foster youth at the One-Stop Employment Centers and to expand awareness among both social workers and providers regarding the importance of employment and training to prepare foster youth for a successful adulthood.
- The FCO facilitated a Foster Youth Higher Education Workgroup which was instrumental in obtaining a Guardian Scholar Project Planning Grant. The Guardian Scholar Project created a dynamic collaboration between the major colleges and agencies in the Sacramento region involved with helping move foster youth toward college and supporting them once they are there.
- The FCO co-chairs the Child and Family Chapter of the National Ombudsman Association. This role enables child welfare ombudsman from all over the country to meet regularly to exchange information and stay informed about major issues impacting child welfare in the United States.
- The FCO participates on the Community Care Licensing Regulations Workgroup, which is rewriting regulations for foster family homes and group homes to create a more normalized home life experience for children in care. The FCO elevated an issue involving the searches of children in foster care and consequently new regulations will be issued.
- The FCO participates on the Foster Youth Mental Health Workgroup, which addresses the issue that foster children and youth who are placed out of their county of jurisdiction have difficulty obtaining needed and timely mental health services. This workgroup was instrumental in the development and passage of Senate Bill 785, requiring the State Department of Mental

Health to establish a process to facilitate receipt of medically necessary specialty mental health services for a foster child who is placed outside of his/ her county of original jurisdiction.

- The FCO participates on the California Foster Youth Educational Taskforce, which has conducted a Statewide Educational Summit as well as the expansion of the Foster Youth Services Program and the development and passage of Assembly Bill 490, which requires that foster youth be enrolled in school immediately and can receive partial credits for class work completed.
 - The FCO participates on the advisory committee that informs the California Permanency for Youth Project, which has created programs in 14 counties to help foster youth to achieve successful permanency after emancipation. This committee was instrumental in the development and passage of Assembly Bill 408, which requires courts and social workers to facilitate permanency for foster children and youth.
 - The FCO participates in the National Governor's Policy Institute on Emancipated Foster Youth (NGA). California is one of six states chosen to participate in this year-long institute to examine and develop policies to assist governmental and nonprofit agencies serving emancipating foster youth to implement creative, viable and effective services to support these youth. The FCO has played a critical role in the NGA-ILP Redesign Committee. The goal is to redesign the ILP program from a classroom based program into a program that focuses on the individual needs of each foster youth. The redesigned ILP program will focus on realizing the following outcomes for each emancipating foster youth: has a lifelong connection; has had work experience while in foster care; and has obtained a High School Diploma or GED. The work of the Academy concludes in December 2007.
 - The FCO is also a member of the California Child Welfare Council. The Council is an advisory body responsible for improving the collaboration and process of the multiple agencies and courts that serve children and youth in the child welfare and foster care systems (described in further detail in the Introduction section).
- It is CDSS' policy to give preferential consideration for placement of a child with a relative. To ensure a child's safety in out-of-home care, specific assessment standards must be met in the relative/non-related extended family member (NREFM) approval process. It is the county's responsibility to review and assess compliance in these core standard review areas prior to approving the relative/NREFM home for placement. Additionally, the county is required to complete an annual reassessment of the relative/NREFM home if the child remains in the relative/NREFM's care. Beginning in October 2002, the CDSS began reviews to determine compliance with the approval process. The CDSS has completed one statewide review of the 58 counties; counties identified as having a compliance level of less than 90% were required to submit a corrective action plan to address areas needing improvement. The CDSS is currently in the process of completing its second statewide review. These reviews assist the CDSS in identifying systemic issues and technical assistance needs.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The C-CFSR was implemented in January 2004 and a complete review of all 58 counties was completed by June 2007. These reviews involved each county in the development of county self-assessments and SIPS which are structured and targeted approaches to the improvement of services that impact the lives of children and families.

As of June 30, 2007, PQCRs have been conducted in all 58 California counties. Final PQCR reports have been received by CDSS from 48 counties. Ten counties are in the process of completing the PQCR reports. Of the 48 county PQCRs conducted, 945 cases were reviewed. The interviewees included child welfare social workers, probation placement officers and supervisors for both social workers and placement probation officers. Focus groups consisting of parents, caregivers (foster parents, relative caregivers, group home operators), community partners/providers; youth, and court workers were conducted in 26 counties. Interview panel members were peer child welfare social workers, probation placement officers and supervisors, community partners, and tribal representatives.

Safe Measures, a proprietary data reporting service that makes timely information available to the counties on key process measures, has improved quality assurance for the State of California since the State and counties began using it. It is a management tool that provides case information at the social worker level. Alameda County's experience is a good example that demonstrates how beneficial the use of *Safe Measures* has been. By using information from *Safe Measures*, Alameda County obtained compliance in six process outcomes they had previously been non-compliant. This improvement resulted in CDSS relieving the county of a formal notice of non-compliance and potential legal action.

The FCO, discussed above, fielded 1,565 calls from foster youth, foster parents, relatives, parents, and professionals between May of 2005 and May 2006.

CHALLENGES

- In order to maintain a consistent quality assurance system, additional staff resources are needed at both the State and the county level. Across disciplines, stakeholders report that workload and caseload contribute to the difficulty of delivering effective quality assurance activities.
- Now that the Outcomes and Accountability system is operational, the challenge is to increase expertise in the area of data analysis and research in order to interpret new and existing data in order to improve practice. It is also a challenge in how to effectively communicate findings to staff and to the community as a whole.
- Maintaining an active level of involvement from community partners and stakeholders over an extended period of time is challenging because it is time consuming and labor intensive for counties, and may not be experienced as sufficiently rewarding to the partners and stakeholders.

PROMISING PRACTICES

In an effort to facilitate the use of evidence-based practice to improve outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being, CDSS funded the development and implementation of the California Child Welfare Evidence Based Clearinghouse in 2004. It serves as an online resource by providing up-to-date information on evidence-based child welfare practices related to serving families involved in public child welfare system.

D. STAFF AND PROVIDER TRAINING

For the first CFSR, California was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. All three items comprising this factor were areas needing improvement, primarily because there was no statewide requirement for initial and on-going staff training and no uniform statewide training required for caregivers.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented to address this factor include:

- Developed and implemented common core curriculum for initial training of staff and supervisors.
- Established requirements for ongoing, consistent statewide staff training.
- Developed and implemented standard training requirements for caregivers.

INTRODUCTION TO CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE TRAINING SYSTEM

California's large, diverse population and county-administered CWS system mandate a complex and varied training system. Accordingly, the state has offered initial and ongoing training in a variety of modalities, tailored to regional and, in some cases, individual county needs. Since the last review, the training system has become more systematized and standardized, particularly as related to initial training.

Within CDSS, the Children and Family Services Division (CFS) provides oversight and support of the county staff development and training for child welfare professional via contractual relationships with the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) and statewide Regional Training Academies; and the Resource Center for Family Focused Practice to provide direct training and to assure effective, culturally competent service delivery.

CalSWEC is a partnership between the schools of social work, public human service agencies, and other related professional organizations. The CDSS contracts with CalSWEC to coordinate both pre-service training/education and in-service training.

The IV-E Stipend Program, which now includes 18 accredited schools of social work, administers child welfare-specialized, competency-based education to prepare and provide financial aid for students and graduates for careers in public child welfare. Since 2003, 905 MSWs and 32 BSWs have graduated after receiving stipends and entered the public child welfare workforce.

The Regional Training Academy Coordination Project coordinates the child welfare training activities of the regional training academies, CDSS, and the counties. The Project also coordinates the statewide evaluation of the initial training, analyzing data at a regional and statewide level to improve the effectiveness of the training. Since the last CFSR, the Project and CDSS have co-chaired the Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC), which has been the primary vehicle for developing and implementing the new, standardized Common Core Curricula for Child Welfare Workers and Supervisors.

The Regional Training Academies and the Inter-University Consortium (RTAs/IUC) work cooperatively to assure that California professionals receive consistent, high quality training that orients staff to the social and professional expectations associated with child welfare practice and, in partnership with the counties in their regions to deliver the Common Core Curricula to enhance the ability of staff in public social services and child welfare agencies to protect children and to prevent placement whenever possible.

The Resource Center for Family Focused Practice (RCFFP) supports a variety of initiatives and practice approaches that are consistent with family-centered and strengths based practice, including: Family to Family, Wraparound, Family Group Decision Making, Integrated Services and California Connected by 25. Additionally, the RCFFP has provided training to Juvenile Probation Officers Initiative, including developing and delivering core training for probation officers.

The CDSS supports training to county child welfare staff in a wide variety of areas as outlined in the 2007 APSR and provides technical assistance and field training to support new laws, regulations, transferring best practices, or assisting individual counties in improving.

Since the last CFSR, additional training supported by CDSS includes, Child Death Review Team Training, YOUTH Training Project, Judicial Council of California's Indian Child Welfare Act Initiative, and Multi-Ethnic Placement Act.

Counties are required to complete training plans annually. Individual counties provide training to child welfare and adoption staff. This includes induction or initial training (supplementary to common core training) that orients new staff to county policies, and ongoing training on a variety of topics. Counties have also initiated a variety of strategies to promote application of learning in the field, such as mentoring programs and on-the-job training activities. A few large counties also provide some portions of the common core training, using the same curricula as the RTAs/IUC.

ITEM 32:

Initial Staff Training. Is the State operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives of the CFSP, addresses services provided under Titles IV-B IV-E, and provides training to all staff who administer those services?

POLICY

While much of the law underlying policy for initial and ongoing training remains the same, the state has made changes to reflect the more standardized delivery of initial training.

The Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 16200 et seq., (Chapter 1310, Statutes of 1987) requires CDSS to provide practice-relevant training for social workers/probation placement officers, agencies under contract with county welfare departments, mandated child abuse reporters and all members of the child welfare delivery system.

State statutes continue to require implementation of a coordinated, statewide training program specifically designed to meet the needs of county child welfare workers assigned to emergency response, family maintenance, family reunification, permanent placement and adoption responsibilities.

The CDSS, with input from the Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC) and the counties, amended Training regulations, Chapter 14-600 – Training Programs to require child welfare workers and supervisors to complete a standardized common core training program. The amendments are set for public hearing in October 2007 for adoption by June 2008. For child welfare workers, the regulations outline highly standardized courses that must be completed in the first year of employment and additional courses must be completed within 2 years. Child Welfare Supervisors must complete a standardized curriculum within the first year of hire or promotion. Counties are required to track the completion of the training as part of the regulations, including the number of new child welfare workers and supervisors, and the proportion of these that have completed the requirement.

These regulations mandate initial training within one year of hire for probation placement officers on concurrent planning, visitation requirements, and termination of parental rights practices. Supervisors are required to attend training within the first year of hire or promotion on: case planning practices; comprehensive assessment including screening for educational and mental health needs; and understanding the significance of state and federal reporting requirements such as AFCARS and NCANDS. This training is tracked by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Additionally, CDSS issued All County Information Notices, ACIN I-66-03 which outlined the training requirements in the PIP; and, ACIN I-49-05 which outlined the scope of the new common core training program. The CDSS provided additional funding to counties to cover the additional time that staff must be away from the office to attend training. County Fiscal Letter (CFL 06-07-10) outlined the availability of \$19.4 million to counties in State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007) for this purpose.

PRACTICE

- During the PIP process, the Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC) implemented the standardized curricula for child welfare workers and supervisors concurrently with the development of the regulations. Implementation of the curricula began June 2005, and expanded as additional areas of need were identified. Final content was added in June 2007.
- Phase I of the Common Core for Line Workers is composed of seven curricula with standardized content, which includes: Assessment of Safety, Risk and Protective Capacity; Family Engagement in Case Planning and Case Management; Child Maltreatment, Child Development, and Placement and Permanency.
- Phase II of the Common Core for Line Workers is composed of thirteen areas with standard competencies and learning objectives, which includes: Basic Interviewing, Caregiver Substance Abuse and Child Welfare Practice, Child Welfare Practice in a Multicultural Environment, Court Procedures, CWS Documentation for Use in the Legal System, Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act/Interethnic Adoptions Provisions, Mental Health & Mental Disorders, Self-Care for New Child Welfare Workers, Domestic Violence, Statewide Automated Case Management System, Supporting Educational Rights and Achievement, Health Outcomes, and Values & Ethics.
- The common core for supervisors is composed of six curricula with standardized content, which includes Child Welfare Policy and Practice for Supervisors, Evidence-Based Practice, Fiscal Essentials, Managing for Results (including outcomes and data), Educational Supervision (including mentoring and training), and Casework Supervision.
- The newly standardized curricula also have common themes that are woven throughout, which support practice principles that are part of California's overall child welfare improvement efforts. These include Family and Youth Engagement, Evidence-Based Practice, Fairness and Equity Issues (including disproportional representation and disparities), Strengths-Based Practice, and Outcomes-Informed Practice
- Placement core curricula for probation placement officers has been developed and delivered across the state. This core training covers legal and regulatory requirements related to IV-E eligible placements including required face-to-face visits, safety, strengths and needs assessments, case planning, transitional independent living plans, concurrent planning, youth and family engagement, termination of parental rights and permanency planning for youth.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Performance in the area is measured both by the completion of core training and by the evaluation of the effectiveness of that training.

As part of the PIP, California adopted the Framework for Training Evaluation on the common core curricula for child welfare workers and supervisors, and can be utilized for other major training initiatives. The Framework allows for a systematic approach to training evaluation.

Under the framework, all new child welfare workers and supervisors complete a demographic form that allows for analysis of validity and bias of the items. All child welfare worker trainees complete knowledge tests on four of the curricula with standardized content, and embedded skills evaluations for two other standardized curricula. Child Welfare Supervisor trainees complete an embedded skills evaluation for Casework Supervision. Evaluation of satisfaction of training is completed for all curricula that are part of the common cores.

Initial analysis of the data shows significant improvements in knowledge and skills in all of the standardized areas that are evaluated. (Not enough data is available for analysis in three areas – preliminary results for these will be available in 2008.) The majority of the items appear to be valid and unbiased. Items that are validated are kept as part of a knowledge item bank, which allows for multiple items to measure the same areas, and improves the security of the testing process.

Part of the Framework involves tracking the completion of training and providing data to counties. The table below is data from the Regional Training Academies and the Inter-University Consortium (RTAs/IUC) on the completion of core training during the period since the last review. This includes the period with the implementation of the common core curricula.

Region/RTA		Number of Trainees that have completed the core series				Number of Trainee Days of Core Provided			
		FY 03/04	FY 04/05	FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 03/04	FY 04/05	FY 05/06	FY 06/07
Bay Area Academy	<i>Line</i>	20	60	90	96	1,119	1,744	2,412	3,853
	<i>Supvsr.</i>	14	23	22	21	227	307	341	324
Central RTA	<i>Line</i>	56	70	105	105	1,808	2,607	3,430	3,034
	<i>Supvsr.</i>	23	40	40	33	162	378	420	386
PCWTA (Southern)	<i>Line</i>	69	170	164	232	1,507	3,122	6,237	4,894
	<i>Supvsr.</i>	0	27	28	61	0	191	292	565
Northern RTA	<i>Line</i>	114	206	114	189	1,482	2,678	1,482	3,402
	<i>Supvsr.</i>	10	33	12	41	90	297	120	410
LA/IUC	<i>Line</i>	81	322	416	264	2,543	11,649	15,806	10,298
	<i>Supvsr.</i>	23	74	24	128	345	1,110	360	1,916
RCFFP	<i>Line</i>	447	165	106	126	378	330	571	814
Total	<i>Line</i>	787	993	995	1,012	8,837	22,130	29,938	26,295
	<i>Supvsr.</i>	70	197	126	284	824	2,283	1,533	3,601

Notes: Counts for FY 06/07 will go up, as more data is entered and more trainees make up core training days. LA/IUC data includes both county-specific induction training & Common Core.

Overall, initial training shows significant progress in California. Standardized curricula are being delivered throughout the state that meets the requirements outlined in Child and Family Service Plan. The training is systematically evaluated for effectiveness, and updated via analysis of this data. Processes are in place to assure that training reflects best practices, and promotes the practice principles that are part of California's child welfare improvement efforts.

In addition, with the development of an effective infrastructure via the STEC, the state is able to adapt statewide initial training to meet changing needs as a result of emerging or evidence-based practices.

CHALLENGES

- Some counties struggle to provide time for staff to attend the required core training in a timely manner, when they are having difficulties covering caseloads and filling positions.
- Lack of funding flexibility has hindered the development of more effective models of training that involve CWS staff training side-by-side with collaborative partners in community-based organizations, mental health agencies, court officers/attorneys, tribes, care providers, etc.
- Travel remains a hindrance to effectively training staff, particularly in rural areas that require at least one day of travel to attend training. Some promising models for distance learning have been developed, but these are not currently available in all regions.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The most notable promising practice in California related to training was described above and is the common core standardized curriculum for line and supervisory staff. California's plans for initial training in the next review period, including the suggestions of the focus groups and stakeholders, are outlined below:

- Final adoption of the training regulations, and implementation of county-based tracking systems across the state that accurately calculate the completion of training to be completed by June 2008.
- Expansion of the ability of the training system to bring the training to the trainees, through further development and implementation of field training and distance learning models of training.
- The Co-Investment Partnership is developing a protocol to coordinate training for other partners in the child welfare system (such as courts and community service providers) and to address the fiscal barriers.
- Continue and enhance training on ICWA, including how to engage tribal partners more effectively. CalSWEC has developed and adopted a core curriculum that includes ICWA to educated social workers regarding the importance of ICWA and the role it plays throughout the life of a CWS case.

- Develop statewide training on visitation (in addition to the common core training already implemented), including ongoing assessment of the need for supervised visitation, and the importance of frequent, quality visits.

ITEM 33 –

Ongoing Staff Training. Does the State provide for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services outlined in the CFSP?

POLICY

As in item 32, much of the law underlying policy for initial and ongoing training remains the same. The state has made changes to reflect a more systemized approach to ongoing training, specifically by creating requirements for staff participation. See item 33 for a summary of the general policies relevant to ongoing training.

The CDSS, with input from the Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC) and the counties, amended training regulations, (Chapter 14-600 – Training Programs) to require child welfare workers and supervisors to complete 40 hours of ongoing training every two years. Counties are required to track the completion of the training as part of the regulation package, including the number of staff that completes the requirement. Similar regulations also require ongoing training for probation placement officers and supervisors.

These regulations are in the same stage of the regulatory process as the regulations for initial training. The \$19.4 million in additional funds available to enable counties to attend the required training also include funds for the ongoing requirements.

PRACTICE

The RTAs/IUC, counties, CDSS and other partners continue to provide a wide array of ongoing training to child welfare workers and supervisors, as outlined in the 2007 APSR. The STEC provides a system for identifying statewide ongoing training needs as they arise, and developing curricula and training materials to meet those needs. Highlighted areas of ongoing training since the last review include:

- training, forums and training institute to improve transition for youth
- training for probation placement officers and supervisors in child welfare services
- family-centered and strengths based practice
- improving data capture and reports
- differential response
- safety assessment
- improving transfer of learning thru field training
- multidisciplinary conferences on juvenile justice and juvenile dependency
- improving understanding and compliance of ICWA for juvenile dependency and justice staff
- co-joint training with county counsels and social workers.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Evaluation of ongoing and advanced training depends on the specific needs of the training. The Framework for Training Evaluation outlined in Item 32 was designed for flexible use, and is generally used to plan for and implement evaluation of training.

Ongoing training by the RTAs/IUC and Regional Center for Family Focused Practice (RCFFP) are provided below. These numbers under-represent the amount of training offered to staff, because they do not account for the number of training days or topics provided by individual counties and other entities. Nevertheless, the data shows a wide array of training days on a wide array of topics.

Region/RTA	Number of Trainee Days Provided, <i>excluding core</i>				Number of Topics offered, <i>excluding core</i>			
	FY 03/04	FY 04/05	FY 05/06	FY 06/07	FY 03/04	FY 04/05	FY 05/06	FY 06/07
Bay Area Academy	3,336	3,696	1,665	3,805	86	66	57	70
Central RTA	2,166	2,467	2,229	2,761	70	85	126	135
PCWTA	5,028	3,821	2,376	3,106	89	81	34	50
Northern RTA	5,358	5,840	4,613	5,637	62	70	78	70
LA/IUC	21,978	18,477	16,862	16,809	258	191	157	167
RCFFP	1,535	4,047	5,919	3,699	16	5	26	25
Total	39,401	38,348	33,664	35,817	581	498	478	517

Notes: Does not include training provided by the counties (except for LA), CDSS or other partners. Counts for FY 06/07 will go up, as more data is entered. LA/IUC data includes both county and IUC training. Central RTAs data does not reflect larger conference-style events or field-based training.

California continues to provide a wide array of trainings for staff serving children and families in the child welfare system. The STEC also provides a forum for identifying and addressing specific statewide training needs, so that new curricula can be designed and training delivered as new policies and legislation arises. At the direction of the STEC, CDSS and counties, CalSWEC has produced training resources for counties to use that assist them in orienting their staff to changes in legislation and policy. RTAs and the RCFFP also have the capacity to develop training resources for their regions.

CHALLENGES

- Although many counties also have devised effective tracking systems to determine what training their staffs have attended, it remains a challenge for some. Counties will be working over State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008) to enhance their tracking systems in order to accurately track the proportion of their staff that have completed the 40 hour training requirement.
- Social worker caseloads and travel time are barriers to attend ongoing training.

PROMISING PRACTICES

California's plans for ongoing training are similar to the State's plans for initial training, since the ongoing training and the initial training are designed to complement each other. Areas not covered under item 32 are:

- additional training development on permanency, such as family finding
- development of training tools that are easy to access and provide workers with the information related to policy and practice changes
- utilize Peer Quality Case Reviews as a mechanism for identifying areas of needed training
- develop training supports to roll out parent partner programs widely in the State, including training with partners

ITEM 34 –

Foster and Adoptive Parent Training. Does the State provide training for current and prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State-licensed or State-approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E? Does the training address the skills and knowledge base that they need to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

POLICY

California law mandates (Assembly Bill 3062, Chapter 1016, Statutes of 1996) all foster parents to obtain education/training at both the pre-service and ongoing service levels. A minimum of 12 hours of pre-service training is required prior to certification of a foster home for initial placement. This is in addition to the mandated First Aid/CPR training. A minimum of eight hours in-service training is required each year that a foster child resides in the home. Welfare and Institutions Code Section 16003 provides for an orientation and training program for relative caregiver and non-relative extended family member caregivers.

The CDSS contracts with community colleges to provide on-going training of foster parents, relative/kinship caregivers, and non-related extended family members. The goal is to provide quality training and support opportunities to caregivers of children and youth in out-of-home care so that providers meet the developmental, educational, emotional and needs of children and youth in the foster care.

Group home staff and foster family agency certified families are also required to complete training. New line staff at group homes and foster family agencies, along with small family home providers, are required to attend 40 hours of training in their first year of employment and 20 hours annually thereafter. California law requires that group home administrators complete a 40-hour certification program in addition to other licensing requirements.

Regulations specify information to be provided to prospective adoptive parents, which is often provided through training that is integrated with foster and adoptive parent training. This was an

area of improvement in the last CFSR, and addressed in the PIP. The improvement goal for this item was to develop a “standard core curriculum . . . used to train caregivers in all counties.” The state completed the tasks outlined in the PIP related to the item. A workgroup convened and determined that a standardized set of objectives would assure that training was consistent, while preserving the flexibility for counties to use the curriculum that works best for them. A set of 41 learning objectives were developed. All counties now use curricula that meet these objectives. All County Letter 05-06 mandates that all providers use curricula that meets the 41 standard learning objectives, and provides resources for training providers to enhance their curriculum in specific areas that an analysis of the training indicated could be improved.

California law (Welfare and Institutions Code Section 11461.e (1)-(3) and Child Welfare Services Manual of Policies and Procedures Section 11-400.3) provide for a specialized rate structure to meet the needs of children requiring higher levels of care. The number of training hours required for specialized care is determined at the individual county level and is included in county plans submitted to CDSS. This system allows a county to supplement the basic foster family home payment rate to provide for more intensive care.

PRACTICE

- Pre-service and in-service training for foster parents is provided through a curriculum tailored to meet the needs of each county. Most counties use the Parent Resource for Information Development Education (PRIDE/Adopt Pride) curriculum or the Permanence and Safety – Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (PS-MAPP) curriculum. Some counties provide training directly to foster and adoptive parents and other counties contract with other organizations (agency or educational institutions) for this purpose. All of the training covers the 41 standard learning objectives developed and adopted as part of the last PIP.
- The CDSS and the Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office collaborate on issues impacting the educational and training of foster parents and relative caregivers. Sixty-four community colleges participate in Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE). The Community College Chancellor’s Office is designated as the agency to administer the program and provide funding to community colleges for the provision of education and training to potential and existing foster parents. This program offers training to kinship care providers per Assembly Bill 2307. The FKCE program plays a vital role in providing licensed foster parents and relative caregivers with the training and education that will help them in meeting the multifaceted and often complex needs of the foster children in their care.
- The Private Adoption Agency Reimbursement Program (PAARP) provides funds to compensate private adoption agencies for costs of placing for adoption and for completing the adoptions of children who are eligible for Adoption Assistance Program benefits because of age, membership in a sibling group, medical or psychological problems, adverse parental background or other circumstances that make placement especially difficult. Through PAARP, private adoption agencies can supplement public agency efforts to recruit and train adoptive parents for foster youth who would otherwise remain in the foster care system.

- The CDSS sponsors training and technical assistance to professionals in the child welfare arena. Providers are among those who benefit from such services, particularly group homes, foster family agencies and small family homes. Highlights of these trainings include Foster Parent Association conferences; Community Care Licensing workshops; Parent Leadership Training; and, Family Group Decision Making training.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Counties are required to complete and submit an annual survey related to the recruitment, retention, and training of foster parents. The data provided by counties is summarized in a report for statewide distribution that can be used by the State and counties in planning future activities. The report can be found at www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/Reports_2315.htm.

In State Fiscal Year 2005-2006 (July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006), as reported in the Resource Family Recruitment, Training and Retention Survey, thirty-one counties provided training hours above the statutorily-required 12 hours of pre-service training to resource families. The statewide median number of pre-service hours provided above that statutorily-required was 12 hours. Forty-seven counties collaborated with resource family organizations and colleges to improve training and retention advisory meetings, workshops, special events, and training.

Compliance with initial and on-going training requirements by group home and small family home staff is monitored by the CDSS Community Care Licensing Division, which verifies training records as part of the licensing process for providers. Additional points are generated under the group home rate system for a group home program that provides its child care and supervision staff with 40 or more hours of formal on-going training per staff per year. This training must be identified in a training plan approved by CDSS as part of a group home programs rate application. During a rate audit, CDSS auditors verify that the training hours projected in the training plan were actually provided by the group home.

CHALLENGES

Due to budget constraints, it is challenging for CDSS to provide ideal levels of training to support foster, adoptive and relative caregivers. California community colleges provide training for foster parents through the Foster & Kinship Care Education Training program. Caregivers need ongoing training to support retention.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP), expanded in State Fiscal Year 2007-2008 (July 1, 2007-June 30, 2008), provides State funds to eligible counties to operate a program of support services to relative caregivers of children who are dependents of the court or who are at risk of dependency or delinquency. California Community Colleges currently receive funds to provide educational programs and workshops for kinship caregivers.

- A Family to Family strategy is to provide respite care for resource families which enable them to attend training. Funding for respite care comes from various sources such as Specialized Care Incentive and Assistance Program (SCIAP), county funding, CWS allocation, Options for Recovery/HIV Infant Program, and Special Training for Adoptive Parents (STAR).

E. SERVICE ARRAY AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

For the first CFSR, California was not in substantial conformity with this systemic factor. Of the three items comprising this factor, Items 36 and 37 were areas needing improvement, primarily due to inaccessibility of services, significant service gaps and services were not individualized.

Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented included:

- Implemented a framework for a differential response system.
- Used the Assembly Bill 636 Outcomes and Accountability system to identify and address service gaps and systemic barriers.
- Convened the State Interagency Team to help ensure children and families in the California child welfare services system receive the appropriate priority for services across systems.
- Created a clearinghouse to disseminate information to counties and provide technical assistance to help implement promising and evidence-based practices.

ITEM 35:

Array of Services. Does the State have in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families, that determine other service needs, that address the needs of families in addition to individual children to create a safe home environment, that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency?

POLICY

The Child Welfare Services (CWS) Program is California's primary statewide intervention program for abused, neglected and exploited children. The statutory authority for the CWS program is contained in Welfare and Institutions Code Section 306. The goal of the program is protect children at-risk of child abuse and neglect or exploitation through an integrated services delivery system, and to provide intensive services to families to ensure safety and permanence that will allow the family to stay together in their own home.

Current statutes and regulations require juvenile courts to order that child welfare services be provided to children in home and to those that are removed from the custody of their parents or guardians; services must also be provided to their parents or guardians, except under narrowly

specified circumstances. State regulations require a county social worker/probation placement officer to develop a case plan that must include objectives to be achieved, specific services to be provided and case management activities to be performed. Since the last review, the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability process is in place in all 58 counties, to further ensure that services are delivered in a way that will improve outcomes for children and families. Counties provide services within State statutes, regulations and guidelines.

The CDSS ensures a service array in accordance with federal regulations that require providing for safety and protection of children, the preservation of and support to families, and ensuring permanency for children. California's child welfare services are State supervised and county administered which means that service array and resource development are achieved statewide through the supervision and support provided by CDSS to the counties and the implementation protocols and best practices by the counties.

PRACTICE

The CDSS ensures the development of a service array in California through legislation, policy guidance, technical assistance, training and other supports, including data collection and evaluation to assist counties in needs assessment, planning, and delivery of services. The following core services are provided statewide:

EMERGENCY RESPONSE (ER)

ER is designed to provide initial intake services in response to reported allegations of child abuse, neglect or exploitation. County welfare departments are required to determine whether an in-person investigation of circumstances and facts is required. When required, in-person investigations are prioritized by the level of risk assessed by the emergency response social worker.

FAMILY MAINTENANCE (FM)

FM is designed to provide time-limited protective services to prevent or remedy neglect, abuse or exploitation for the purpose of maintaining children in their own home. County welfare departments are responsible for determining the specific services needs of the child and family prevent the child from being placed in out-of-home care.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION (FR)

FR is designed to provide time-limited services while the child is in out-of-home care. County welfare departments are responsible for providing services in order to reunite children with their parent(s). Pursuant to the case plan, services ranging from parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, counseling to transportation, housing assistance, etc. may be offered to the parents.

PERMANENT PLACEMENT (PP)

PP is designed to provide an alternative permanent family structure for children who cannot safely live with their parents and who are not likely to return to their own home. County welfare departments are responsible for determining the appropriate permanency plan for the child and facilitating the implementation of that plan. These plans are: adoption, guardianship or long-term foster care.

ADOPTION

When it is determined through a child assessment that adoption is an appropriate plan, the court orders a hearing to terminate parental rights and establish adoption as the case plan goal. When the child's permanency goal is adoption social workers seek adoptive parents for the child. If the current caregiver or relatives are not appropriate or available, recruitment efforts are expanded to look at other potential adoptive families. This search for an adoptive family includes contact with private adoption agencies and other jurisdictions as well as posting children on the state and national adoption exchanges. Prospective adoptive parents are assessed according to established criteria. The CDSS provides adoption services in 28 counties and in the remaining counties, adoption services are provided by licensed county adoption agencies.

Once termination of parental rights has occurred and adoption is the goal, court hearings are regularly held to evaluate the progress toward identifying an adoptive family and legally finalizing the adoption.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM (ILP)

The ILP is designed to assist youth who are aged 16, and emancipating from care, up to the day prior the youth's 21st birthday, to receive the training and skills needed to become self-sufficient adults.

PREVENTION SERVICES

The CDSS provides resources to county child welfare service agencies through federal grants and State General Fund sources to build community capacity to respond to locally identified needs. Prevention occurs all along the service continuum described above, as well as before child welfare services are necessary. This collaborative approach to meeting child and parental needs is based on public-private partnerships and shared outcomes and accountability. Preventive services provided by counties based on their needs assessment include the following: individual, group, and family counseling; parenting education and support; home visiting; respite care; child care; multidisciplinary team services; public awareness and education; community and social services referrals; pre-placement preventive service programs; mental health services; alcohol and other drug services, assistance to address domestic violence; and temporary child care and therapeutic services for families, including crisis nurseries;

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

As a part of the last Performance Improvement Plan, one of California's objectives was to increase the percentage of children, parents and caregivers whose needs were assessed and who received services to meet those needs, by three percentage points. For this objective, there are two measures that needed to be met before it was considered achieved: 1) the percentage of children, parents and caregivers whose needs were assessed; and 2) the percentage of children, parents and caregivers who received services to meet those needs. California met the goals in both of these measures.

Stakeholder input was in general agreement that there is an array of various services available to children in families; however, they also noted that community resource capacity varies from community to community and is insufficient in many areas. They were particularly positive about the KinGAP program and the Kinship Support Service Program (KSSP). Stakeholders indicated that pilot programs implementing participatory case planning strategies such as Team Decision Making, Family Group Decision Making and Wraparound Services are very effective, where they exist. Stakeholders also reported that CDSS has made efforts to strengthen the service array through public-private partnerships.

CHALLENGES

- The limitations of community resource capacity make it challenging to meet the needs of children and parents. For example, the availability services that are culturally matched to child and family are limited in many California communities; qualified therapeutic providers are not available in all jurisdictions; and, it is difficult to find a sufficient number of qualified bi-lingual staff.
- Federal funding is insufficient or inflexible to adequately support child welfare services in California.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The California Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership is a public-private partnership whose purpose is improving the lives of children and families who are in or are at-risk of entering the State's child welfare system. Formed in 2006, the Partnership includes organizations committed to investing in the practices and supportive infrastructure that will improve the child welfare outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being.
- The KSSP provides services to relative caregivers who provide with safe, stable and permanent placements. This funding was allocated on a competitive basis to 21 counties which are in various stages of implementation.
- Dependency Drug Courts (DDC) monitor families who are involved with the child welfare system and for whom substance abuse is a contributing factor. The court oversees compliance with the law, protection and permanency planning for children and therapeutic interventions for individuals with substance abuse problems. In California and in other states, dependency drug courts have positive effects on child welfare case outcomes.
- The Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) is taking a new direction in the development and implementation of trainings to the field that will bring the department closer to the goal of improving outcomes for California's children and families. The overall goal is to foster a collaborative relationship in local communities where parents and professionals can work together to ensure quality services for children and families.

ITEM 36:

Service Accessibility. Are the services in item 35 accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP?

POLICY

Counties in California engage in a process to assess the need for community based services for child welfare clients on a regular basis that varies somewhat by county. Based on the assessment process, counties' child welfare agencies compliment their core services through contracts with private providers or community based organizations, or establishes memorandums of understanding with other county agencies to meet the service and resource needs of a particular geographic region or target population.

PRACTICE

- The CDSS ensures that all counties provide emergency response, family maintenance, family reunification, permanent placement, adoption and independent living program services to children and families in the child welfare system.
- Currently, CDSS requires all counties to integrate specific funds for services that are allocated to the counties. These funds are: State General Fund, Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment; federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families; and, federal Community Based Child Abuse Prevention. Counties must develop a single county plan to maximize service delivery and increase effectiveness of these funds. County CWS agencies are instructed via the three-year prevention plan All County Information Notice to include details on how the agency will ensure accountability for the CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF programs specific to each of the three programs and not limited to a general description of current practices. This approach is consistent with federal requirements to coordinate and integrate efforts. In the near future, CDSS will combine the above described process into the Outcomes and Accountability system so that counties have one comprehensive plan.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Parents who participated in the CDSS statewide survey stated that social workers helped them with services, specifically: parenting classes; arranging for school/tutoring assistance for their child(ren); provision of transportation assistance; and, counseling for themselves and their child(ren). Parents also acknowledged receiving legal assistance and job training/job search assistance.

CHALLENGES

- California's sheer size, which includes many large densely populated urban areas and many large sparsely populated rural areas, makes it difficult for services of every kind and at every level to be equally available to all children and families who need them at a particular time.
- Transportation is a challenge that was cited by all stakeholder groups involved in the statewide assessment process. It impacts counties of all sizes. Parents and children in small counties often

have to travel outside of their own counties in order to access services. Many children and parents are unable to access services within their community and must travel a great distance to a service provider within their own county. California is also handicapped by having a poor and very fragmented public transportation system in most areas.

- The cultural and ethnic diversity in California creates a demand for culturally competent, multi-lingual service providers. The demands are greater than the number of qualified providers currently available.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Twenty-one counties are now planning, starting-up or operating a Kinship Support Services Program. The original program was limited to 11 counties until legislation enacted in State Fiscal Year 2006-2007 (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007) changed requirements to expand county participation.
- In 2005, the Mental Health Services Act became law in California. One of the Act's priorities is developing and providing enhanced mental health services for children and youth with serious emotional disturbances; this includes transition age youth, and will vary by county. As counties implement their plans, there should be an increased level of services to foster children which may improve placement stability.
- The Office of Child Abuse Prevention within CDSS has piloted initiatives to improve public-private partnerships between child welfare agencies and their community based partners to enhance collaborative efforts to provide an array of quality services for children and families served by CWS.
- Funding to local communities through the California's First 5 has expanded services to families of children pre-birth through five years of age with a particular emphasis on school readiness.
- Legislation established in 1999 (Assembly Bill 1259), empowered Humboldt County to conduct an assessment of its multi-departmental organizational structure and reorganize to promote increased efficiency in administration, enhanced integrated service delivery and increased access to funding. In relation to this organizational restructuring strategy, Humboldt County integrated several Departments (Social Services, Mental Health, Public Health, Employment Training, Veterans Services and Public Guardian) to form the Department of Health and Human Services. Since the last review, services have been decentralized in close proximity to clients to the maximum extent feasible. Branches with interrelated programs for children, families and adults now deliver coordinated, efficient services and maximize the resources available to deliver those services.

ITEM 37:

Individualizing Services. Can the services in item 35 be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?

POLICY

California's Manual of Policies and Procedures (MPP), Division 31 Section 31-200, outlines the requirements for the assessment of services needs using the case plan. When it has been determined that child welfare services are to be provided, the social worker/probation placement officer shall complete an assessment and determine the case plan goal. An assessment is completed for each child and identifies services are to be provided. The assessment includes gathering and evaluating information relevant to the case situation and appraising case services needs.

When determining the case plan goal, the social worker/probation placement officer shall consider the following order for priority for services: family maintenance, family reunification, permanent placement, adoption and guardianship.

The individual child's case plan shall be the guiding principle in the provision of child welfare services (MPP Section 31-301). The social worker/probation placement officer shall ensure that the provision of all services is consistent with the case plan goals as specified in the child's case plan.

PRACTICE

- When cases are opened for in-home services, or when children are placed in foster care, social workers develop case plans in partnership with the families that identify individualized child safety, permanency, and well being goals; and, describe the social and other supportive services or resources required to achieve the goals.
- Case plans developed with families address the specific and unique issues of the children and the parents that contributed to the abuse and neglect and provide for the provision of services to address those issues.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

As of June 30, 2005, 20 percent of the counties addressed at least one identified service gap to target access to the service array for youth, American Indian and African American children to address generic non-individualized case planning

CHALLENGES

- The Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS) which is used by social workers to develop case plans can inhibit individualizing services because its format provides a checklist of prescribed services rather than encouraging workers to develop a unique case plan in concert with the needs of children and families.
- Probation does not have access to the CWS/CMS system to document case plans and track services.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- A key component of the Wraparound model requires that child and family team plans be individualized to meet the child and/or family needs. These plans are typically attached to the case plan.
- Participatory case planning strategies, such as Family Group Decision Making and family engagement models, encourage early and regular family involvement in case planning.

F. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

For the first CFSR, California was in substantial conformity with this systemic factor.

ITEM 38:

State Engagement in Consultation with Stakeholders. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, does the State engage in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies, and include the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP?

POLICY

The CDSS is committed to coordinating its services with those of other public and private agencies to better meet the needs of children and families. In an effort to deliver the appropriate services to families in the most beneficial manner, CDSS participates in a number of committees, workgroups, forums, task forces and special projects. Representation includes, but is not limited to, educational/research institutions and agencies related to drug and alcohol, health, mental health, education, domestic violence, and juvenile courts, representing various counties. Collaboration with stakeholders at both the state and local levels has increased since the last CFSR.

The CDSS develops and implements the Title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan according to federal regulations (45 CFR 1357) requiring broad involvement and consultation with a range of public and private non-profit agencies and community based organizations, parents, tribes, and others.

The Statewide Citizens Review Panel is comprised of child advocates, parent leaders, tribal leaders, foundation officers, county mental health managers, county counsels, foster parents, tribal members, foster youth, social workers, and the Judicial Council. Membership is also geographically diverse with representatives from both metropolitan and rural counties in all parts of California. Each year the panel reviews, provides information, and comments upon the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), which updates the Title IV-B Child and Family Services plan prior its submission to Region IX of the Administration for Children and Families. The CDSS staff has made presentations on the draft of California's Annual Progress and Services Report to the statewide CRP each year. The CRP members provide CDSS staff with valuable feedback and also with information about projects in the state that they believe should be included in the report. In FFY 2007, the panel will focus its attention

on the state's efforts to standardize the decision making process at critical stages of a child abuse investigation. A secondary issue is whether this process has an adverse impact on ethnic groups or parents who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

PRACTICE

- The ICWA Workgroup was formed in July 2002, and is utilized by CDSS as a method of consulting with tribes. It continues to expand its membership and now consists of over 35 tribal ICWA workers and/or advocates, 10 county child welfare and probation representatives and 10 CDSS staff. The CDSS continues to work with the self identified representatives of 107 federally recognized California tribes, as well as the approximately 50 tribes that are not currently recognized. The tribal members of the Workgroup were chosen by the California tribes as their representatives to CDSS. The Workgroup meets bi-monthly to discuss ICWA issues and make recommendations to ensure implementation of the Act. Consultation also occurs via electronic mail. The ICWA Workgroup members participate in many CFSD workgroups and committees.
- The State Interagency Team (SIT), as described in the Introduction section, provides leadership and guidance to facilitate implementation of improved systems that benefit the common population of children, youth and families served by SIT agencies. The SIT promotes shared responsibility and accountability for the welfare of children, youth and families through planning, funding and policy development across state departments and philanthropy.
- The California Mental Health Planning Council (CMHPC) is mandated by federal and state statute to advocate for children with serious emotional disturbances, and for adults and older adults with serious mental illness; to provide oversight and accountability for the public mental health system; and to advise the Administration and the Legislature on priority issues and participate in statewide planning. The CMHPC is a multicultural consumer, family, provider, and advocate organization. It provides oversight to the Department of Mental Health regarding accessibility, availability, and accountability of the State's mental health system. It also advocates for accessible, timely, appropriate, and effective services, which are culturally competent, age and gender appropriate, strengths-based, and recovery-oriented; and, educates the public and the mental health constituency about the current needs for public mental health services and ways to meet those needs.
- Each county designates a local Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC). These councils advocate at the local level for child abuse prevention. Council membership is comprised of public and private agencies, prevention stakeholders, and parents. These councils provide a mechanism for CDSS to receive input regarding prevention and training program development, priorities for funding, and receiving consumer feedback.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Outcomes and Accountability System began in January 2004, and is an outcomes based child welfare review system that includes federal and State outcomes. Counties receive quarterly data reports for the outcome measures, and use a self improvement plan to address areas of need. The

CDSS uses the data to monitor state progress and to assist counties in meeting California's outcome goals. The county self assessment and system improvement plan process includes stakeholders at the local level. The data has been shared widely at the state and local level with community partners, the Legislature, the courts, tribes, and other governmental agencies to name but a few.

Other evidence of effectiveness is the collaboration demonstrated by the SIT, which is comprised of representatives from several state agencies serving the child welfare population. The SIT has agreed on common outcomes and goals to maximize efforts to improve child and family outcomes that are consistent with the CDSS Child and Family Services Plan.

The CDSS works collaboratively with the private non-profit sector through Child Abuse Prevention Councils and representatives of the family resource center sector to implement the CFSP.

Likewise, CDSS works closely with courts, tribes, foundations, the Statewide Citizen Review Panel, universities, and statewide associations through various workgroups, committees, and initiatives. Parents and consumer voices are represented on many of these groups. As an active member on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care, CDSS and the courts work together to achieve CFSP goals and outcomes.

CHALLENGES

- The use of different terminology and data collection by different disciplines who serve children in the State interferes with effective communication between agencies and stakeholders. While many agencies have agreed upon common goals and objectives, the methods of measurement vary across systems, making it difficult to communicate about implementation.
- In a state the size of California, bringing stakeholders together is challenging due to the length of time and distance to travel to collaborative meetings. This is a challenge in both rural areas and urban areas.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- In accordance with Senate Bill 636 Outcomes and Accountability Act, CDSS has directed all 58 counties and their community stakeholders to engage in and complete a county specific self assessment and to develop system improvement plans.
- The Court Improvement Project has entered into an interagency agreement with CDSS to use the CFSR data resources to provide data on safety and permanency outcomes for children specifically to judicial officers to further their involvement in the state's Outcomes and Accountability project. The Court Improvement Project staff is also coordinating input from CDSS and CWS/CMS designers into the upcoming California Court Case Management System to align data elements, reduce duplication, enhance information sharing and follow a common schema of performance measurement.

- California was chosen to participate in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Policy Academy on Youth Transitioning Out of Foster Care. The Academy, which runs from June 2006 through December 2007, provides a unique opportunity for six state teams to work together, with the assistance of national and state experts, to improve outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The objective of this project is to redesign the Independent Living Program (ILP). Specifically, services will be individualized and include foster parents as a key partners in developing the service plan for each youth. California's team identified three key goals: permanence-every youth will have lifelong connections with family and supportive adults; education-every youth will have a quality education, a high school diploma and support in pursuing post-secondary opportunities; and, employment-every youth will have work experience and training opportunities that will prepare them for and place them in living wage employment and careers. Once the recommendations made by California's team are adopted, CDSS will work with CWDA, county ILP administrators, the California Foster Parent Association and other stakeholder groups to implement the new program design.

ITEM 39:

Agency Annual Reports Pursuant to the CFSP. Does the agency develop, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP?

POLICY

The California Department of Social Services develops the Title IV-B Child and Services Plan Annual Progress and Services Report according to federal regulations at 45 CFR 1357. The report is developed with broad involvement and consultation with a range of public and private non-profit agencies, community based organizations, parents, youth, and others. The last one was submitted on June 30, 2007. While CDSS is responsible for the mechanics of writing the State's Child and Family Services Plan, the work of these extensive collaborations forms the foundation of the plan itself and the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). For example, policy issues that arise out of work with the counties through the CWDA Children's Committee, the Outcomes and Accountability Data Committee, or the Outcomes and Accountability Policy Committee result in those new policies or revised policies reported in the APSR. The APSR reflects a sample of the collaborative work being done with these various groups.

PRACTICE

- Over time, these collaborations have become more institutionalized, with some being required by legislation, others by funding mechanisms and still others essential to the work. While each may deal with a different aspect of the overall child welfare system, each partnership has common features: discussions on program implementation, two-way communication about concerns and issues, cooperative planning, prioritizing and problem-solving. Some of the many ways the state engages stakeholders are described in Item 38. In addition, major program changes or issues that arise are addressed through the various modes of communication with partnering agencies. The following are examples of such collaboration:

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- CWDA Children's Committee (functions through monthly meetings of representatives from the counties and CDSS to share concerns, policy issues and planning efforts).
 - Outcomes and Accountability Data Committee (functions through bimonthly meetings of representatives from the counties and CDSS to resolve data issues arising from our outcome data).
 - Outcomes and Accountability Policy Committee (functions through bimonthly meetings of representatives from the counties and CDSS to resolve policy issues arising from our outcome data and develop new measures).
 - The ICWA Workgroup (meets bimonthly) to address issues regarding ICWA compliance and challenges.
 - The CDSS and the CWDA Adoptions Subcommittee (meets quarterly).
 - The CDSS and California Association of Adoption Agencies (meets quarterly).
 - The CDSS and public adoption agencies (meets quarterly in five regions).
 - The CDSS and the CWDA Licensing Subcommittee on foster parenting issues (meets quarterly).
 - The CDSS and the California Youth Connection.
 - The Statewide Citizens' Review Panel (meets quarterly).
 - The CDSS and the AOC's Court Improvement Program (CIP) (meets at least quarterly).
 - The CDSS membership in the California Child Welfare Council. The first convening of the Council was held in November 2007.
- The California Citizens' Review Panel (CCRP) was convened to examine the policies practices and procedures of the state's CWS agency. Twenty-two panel members were selected by October of 2004 and the number grew to 30 members over the last two years. The membership draws from child advocates, parent leaders, tribal leaders, foundation officers, county mental health managers, law enforcement, county counsels, alcohol and drug program administrators, foster parents, foster youth, social workers, probation officers and the Judicial Council. The membership is geographically diverse with representatives from both metropolitan and rural counties in all parts of California. Each year the panel reviews, provides information, and comments upon the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), which updates the Title IV-B Child and Family Services plan prior to its submission to Region IX of the Administration for Children and Families. Recently, the CCRP has been reviewing the State's Standardized Safety Assessment System.
 - Parents also provide key input into the State's child welfare services program. The State CRP includes two biological parents who are parent leaders and active participants. Since 1999, Parents Anonymous® Inc. has been partnering with CDSS to provide parent leadership training and technical assistance to child abuse prevention agencies across the State to encourage and support shared leadership. Parents Anonymous® Inc.'s grant objectives include the provisions of intensive training and technical assistance to 8 counties per fiscal year; the provision of one general parent leadership training to three counties; the expansion of leadership training and activities of the California Parent Leadership Team; and the production of a newsletter biannually that highlights successful parent and shared leadership strategies throughout the state.

- At both the State and county levels, multiple opportunities are available for all stakeholders (tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court and other public and private child and family-serving agencies) to be engaged in defining the needs of children and families at risk and planning the services necessary to meet those needs. The major concerns of stakeholders are fundamental to the development of the State's Child and Family Services Plan and the county delivery of those services. The two-way communication between CDSS, which is ultimately responsible for producing the Child and Family Services Plan, and the extensive network of critical stakeholders of the child welfare system, is integral to this plan's development.
- County social services agencies are directly involved with a myriad of stakeholders and use a wide variety of means to engage them. Such collaborative activities at the local level are funneled into the development of the Child and Family Services Plan through the regular, ongoing meetings among CDSS and counties, provider associations, advocates, etc. Focus groups, meetings, training sessions, case staffings, newsletters, conferences, advisory boards, client surveys, community forums and town hall meetings are methods used across the 58 counties to involve the community in the child welfare system. In a state as large and diverse as California, engaging and listening to child welfare stakeholders is an ever-present, multi-level task. Programs, policies, regulations, practice and evaluation all require the contributions of practitioners, children, parents, caregivers, tribes, advocates, legislators, researchers and other allied professions.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

As mentioned above, the last Title IV-B Child and Services Plan Annual Progress and Services Report according to federal regulations at 45 CFR 1357 was submitted June 30, 2007. As described above, CDSS engaged stakeholders in the process of the annual update.

CHALLENGES

There are challenges related to the effective collaboration in a state with the size and complexity of California as mentioned in Item 38.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Just as CDSS initiates collaborations among stakeholders at various levels, counties actively collaborate at the local level with providers and community-based service agencies. To achieve this collaboration, counties have formed local advisory boards, coordinating policy councils, and interagency collaboratives. They have conducted community forums and surveys to obtain valuable input on how to ensure that children and families are better served. Almost all counties hold regular meetings with public agencies (mental health, public health, etc.), educational institutions, foster parent associations, child abuse councils, probation departments, the courts, private groups, youth groups, law enforcement, the business community and commissions.
- As mentioned previously, the State Interagency Team (SIT) consisting of the state level departments that deal with children's issues has begun the process of true collaboration at the highest level in an effort to streamline and coordinate services for children in California.

ITEM 40:

Coordination of CFSP Services with Other Federal Programs. Are the State's services under the CFSP coordinated with the services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?

POLICY

Federal and State statutes require that a written agreement be in effect between the county probation and county child welfare agency in order to claim federal Title IV-E funds for foster children supervised by a probation department. The CDSS issued All County Letters in November 1999 and March 2000, that addressed the counties' responsibility to maintain these written agreements; ensure proper supervision and provision of services for all AFDC-FC funded foster care placements; and modify their existing agreements, as needed, to incorporate recent changes in federal and State law.

An All County Letter (ACL 06-54) was issued in December of 2006 to inform county welfare departments about an amendment to the Federal Child Abuse Prevention treatment Act (CAPTA). The amendment requires the State to ensure that policies and procedures are in place to refer children under the age of three, who are involved with a substantiated abuse and neglect case, to Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act...“ 42 U.S.C. 5106a (b) (2) (A) (xxi) commonly known in our State as Early Start (ES). The Early Start services include a developmental screening and assessment process to determine if the child needs early intervention services.

PRACTICE

- To more effectively meet the needs of the children and families served, CDSS and local county child welfare agencies enter into contracts or agreements with public or private agencies to perform Title IV-B and Title IV-E functions. To ensure compliance with State and federal requirements, these contracts are competitively procured and routinely include reviews, deliverables, outcome measures and reporting requirements.
- Although State regulations prohibit counties from routinely contracting for basic case management services, many other services to children and families are delivered as a result of contracts or agreements. Since California is a State-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, county child welfare agencies, as well as CDSS, enter into many different agreements or contracts to most effectively accomplish all necessary functions.
- An agreement exists between the California Department of Developmental Services (CDDS) and CDSS with respect to foster children who are developmentally delayed. The CDDS is responsible for assessment and coordination of services for children with developmental disabilities through a statewide system of 21 locally-based regional centers. The assessment, placement and service delivery for a dual-agency child is a collaborative effort between the local county welfare department and the regional center. Although the regional centers assist in identifying an appropriate placement, the county welfare departments are ultimately responsible for ensuring the placement adequately meets the needs of these dual-agency clients. The CDSS uses AFDC-FC funds to pay the placement rate established by CDDS; the county child welfare agency is responsible for

ensuring that the claim submitted for payment of funds is for allowable costs and for the correct amount.

It is California's intent to ensure a clear link between child abuse prevention and CFSP goals by focusing efforts and funding toward the enhancement of community capacity to ensure the safety of children and promote the well-being of children and families. Funding from available sources, as discussed earlier, including federal PSSF, CAPTA and CBCAP, the State CAPIT Fund, the local Children's Trust Funds, and private donations are combined to meet shared goals and objectives to provide a continuum of services to children and families.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

Each contract or agreement is monitored through a different mechanism, depending on the nature of the services provided and the parties involved. Contracts generally contain provisions for annual audits. Methods of oversight for agreements or contracts fall into three categories:

- Review process for county compliance to child welfare program regulations.
- Monitor for specific deliverable services or products prior to payment.
- Pilot or demonstration projects are monitored through evaluation for performance or outcomes.

CHALLENGES

- The State-supervised, county-administered nature of California's child welfare program makes contracting and tracking Title IV-B, IV-E, and other federally funded activities more complex and challenging.
- Although counties and their partners collaborate to maximize resources and services, the capacity of communities to meet the needs of children and families fall short of the demand.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- California's Court Improvement Program (CIP) at the Administrative Office of the Courts continues to work collaboratively with CDSS. The CIP has developed local court self-assessment tools to aid in the improvement process.
- The CalWORKs/Child Welfare Partnership Project, also known as the Linkages Project, was launched in November 2000 to develop a coordinated services approach to better serve families and improve outcomes. The CDSS submitted a proposal for funding and was awarded a federal grant in October 2006 to expand the Linkages Project. Approximately 30 counties will participate in the grant implementation and will receive training and technical assistance over the five year grant period. The goal is to deepen and broaden the collaboration between CalWORKs and child welfare services at the county and State level.
- On March 31, 2006, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) approved California's Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project (CAP) proposal that would allow Title IV-E funds, which are restricted to pay for board and care costs and child welfare

administration, to be used by Alameda and Los Angeles counties for direct services and supports in order to avoid the over reliance on out-of-home care and reunify families more expeditiously.

The CAP will target IV-E eligible and non IV-E eligible children ages zero through 19 years currently in out-of-home placement, or who are at risk of entering or re-entering foster care. The foster care population from these two counties that would be impacted under the demonstration project represents 37% of the foster care caseload in California. The Waiver Demonstration was implemented on July 1, 2007.

- Early intervention services for children under the age of three have been impacted by the enactment of the Part C referral provisions for children under the age of three in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 2003. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) opened the opportunity to improve collaboration with California's Early Start program, which is the lead agency for the Federal Early Intervention Services program. The CAPTA provides federal funding to states in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities. Children under age three involved in substantiated cases of abuse or neglect, and their families, stand to benefit from the expansion of resources and services. The IDEA required the establishment of a State Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) that includes representatives from all State Departments, including the State child welfare agency responsible for foster care. The CDSS consistently sits as member on the State ICC to address the issues of young children in foster care and child welfare
- There was a major change in county plan instructions for the three-year cycle beginning July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2008. The CDSS now requires counties to combine their Child Abuse Prevention Intervention and Treatment (CAPIT) / Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) and Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) plans into a single county plan in order to maximize service delivery and increase the effectiveness of available funding. Public agencies, community partners and parent consumers were involved in the planning and development process. This approach is intended to coordinate and integrate California's prevention efforts with the goals of the Child Welfare System Improvements and the outcome measures of the Outcomes and Accountability System.

G. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE HOME LICENSING, APPROVAL, AND RECRUITMENT

For the first CFSR, California was not in substantial conformity. Of the four items comprising this factor, Items 42 and 44 were areas needing improvement. Program Improvement Plan (PIP) strategies implemented includes the following:

- Instituted a formal process for relative approvals.
- Instituted a formal process to train all state and county foster care licensing/approval staff on applying the same licensing approval standards

ITEM 41:

Standards for Foster Homes and Institutions. Has the State implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions that are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards?

POLICY

California's licensing standards were originally established in 1977 and have been routinely updated since that time. These standards, set forth in State statutes (CCR Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 9.5) and regulations (Community Care Facilities Act beginning with Section 1500 of the Health and Safety Code), specifically address the areas of safety, admissions policies, sanitation, and civil rights for foster family homes, as referenced in the Final Rule for the Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA). The regulations are updated as needed to reflect changes in law or programmatic needs.

The following are the key licensing and approval requirements for all foster homes, including those for kin caregivers:

- All persons who operate, manage, or provide direct care services in a community care facility as stated in section 1522 of the Health and Safety Code, obtain a criminal record clearance.
- The caregiver qualifications must indicate the ability to provide appropriate care and supervision, knowledge of applicable laws and regulations, and maintenance of financial records.
- The physical environment must be clean, safe, sanitary and in good repair.
- The caregiver ensures that each child is accorded personal rights.

The standards apply to the following placement types:

- Foster family home: a home licensed by the State or county to care for children from any placing agent.
- Kin caregiver: a relative or non-related extended family member approved by the county child welfare agency to care for a specific child or sibling group.
- Foster family agency certified family homes: a home certified by a Foster Family Agency under its license for placement of a child through the certifying agency Foster Family Agency are private, nonprofit corporations that recruit, certify, train and provide professional support to the homes accepted into their network. These certified homes provide care for children who require intensive services that would otherwise be available only in childcare institutions.).
- Childcare institutions (referred to in California as "group homes"): A facility that provides 24-hour care and supervision to both dependents and wards in a specific client group (e.g.,, children who are seriously emotionally disturbed). Emergency shelters are licensed county group homes or licensed private non-profit group homes whose sole purpose is to provide a short-term residential program for children who have been removed from their homes or adjudged dependents of the court.

Though the standards are applied the same to foster care licensed homes and relative caregiver homes, they are not monitored by the same entities in CDSS. Community Care Licensing Division

monitors foster care licensed homes, while the Relative Assessment and Monitoring Unit in the Children's Services Operations and Evaluation Branch of CFSD monitors approved relative homes.

For a review of "standards and conditions of waivers", see Foster Family Home (FFH) regulations under Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 9.5, section 89224. This section thoroughly addresses and specifies "Waivers and Exemptions."

The CDSS, county child welfare agencies and courts all bear responsibility for enforcement of these standards. The CDSS performs the licensing function for foster family homes in 17 counties (Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Humboldt, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Madera, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Plumas, Riverside, Sierra, Siskiyou, and Yolo) and for foster family agencies, childcare institutions, and public and private adoption agencies in all 58 counties. In the remaining 41 counties, foster family home licensing is contracted out to the county child welfare agency. Foster family agencies certify foster homes under their licenses. Both public and private adoption agencies may approve adoptive homes under their licenses. Licensing, approval or certification requirements are consistent for each placement type (with the exception of homes certified by foster family agencies) regardless of the jurisdiction. Licensing and approval standards are the same across all of these placement types.

In 2006, the Children's Residential Regulations Review workgroup was established in an effort to modify foster home regulations for youth to have a more "normal" home-like setting in foster care, and to better prepare to be self-sufficient when emancipating from the foster care system. The goal was to review all existing regulations and make recommendations for change. As a result of this review process, new regulations are being drafted and will be presented to the Legislature in the near future.

PRACTICE

- California has consistently honed its enforcement program in an effort to ensure that licensing and approval standards for all categories of placement types are rigorously and effectively established, maintained and enforced in accordance with national standards. The policies are disseminated and mechanisms are in place to enforce and monitor compliance through licensing authorities, court review and approval processes. In addition, the standards are updated in an effort to improve outcomes for children in out-of-home placement.
- Compliance is achieved by routine monitoring and ongoing case management of children placed with kin caregivers. During any complaint investigation, the licensing agency documents concerns or issues of non-compliance and assists the home in developing a corrective action plan. Kin caregivers are routinely monitored and undergo annual reviews to maintain approval standards by county relative approval units or other review staff. In addition to regular visits by the social worker/probation placement officer, kin caregivers are reviewed at the child's six month status review hearing. If the child's needs are not being met by the caregiver, including any changes in the condition of the home that could jeopardize the child's safety or wellbeing, the social worker/probation placement officer may make recommendations for corrective action or may recommend removal of the child from the placement.

- Public and private adoption agencies, foster family agencies, and childcare institutions are all licensed exclusively by CDSS. The CDSS monitors on a regular basis, as set forth in the California Health and Safety Code Section 1534(a)(1)(B). Corrective actions in response to violations include fiscal sanctions, issuance of a probationary license, temporary suspension orders, or revocation of the license.
- The Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) conducts annual visits to specified facility categories under the following conditions:
 - when a licensee is on probation;
 - when the terms of agreement in a facility compliance plan requires an annual evaluation;
 - when an accusation against a licensee is pending;
 - when a facility requires an annual visit as a condition of receiving federal financial participation; and,
 - in order to verify that a person who has been ordered out of a facility by the Department is no longer at the facility.
- If these conditions do not exist, then annual visits shall be made to 30% of the total licensed facilities (e.g., foster family homes, group homes, and foster family agency certified homes), using a random sample methodology. The CCLD shall visit all facilities subject to random sampling at least once every 5 years.
- Subsequent to the release of the ASFA Final Rule in January 2000, CDSS and its stakeholder partners embarked on a review of the licensing/approval requirements for placement resources. The purpose was to ensure consistent safety standards across licensing and approval processes and identification of barriers to recruitment and retention of foster families and kin caregivers.
- In addition to the licensing review process, additional controls have been established to ensure that group home providers and foster family agencies adhere to State and federal program and funding requirements. These additional reviews for group homes and foster family agencies include program and financial audits.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

California law requires preferential placement with relatives. Since that time, the number of foster children placed with relatives has grown from 7% (1984) to a high of 48% (1998), to the current level of 46% of the total foster care population. This significant growth has resulted in legislative and regulatory changes designed to improve service delivery to both children and their kin caregivers. Approved relative caregivers and non-related extended family member caregivers, while not required to obtain a foster family home license, are required to meet the identical standards used to license non-relative families.

In 2003 and 2006, a federal Title IV-E eligibility audit was conducted in California. In 2003, California passed at the 90 percent level and in 2006, passed at the 95 percent level of compliance with IV-E eligibility requirements.

CHALLENGES

- Foster home regulations meant to protect children and promote safety can become barriers to placing large sibling groups together. There are restrictions on the number of children per bedroom and the total number of children placed in one home, which often limits caregivers from taking all the children in a sibling group. Additionally, foster home regulations often conflict with cultural and ethnic beliefs and lifestyles which can discourage caregivers from placing children in their care. For example, a child with a specific religious belief or upbringing residing with a caregiver family may want to practice his/her religion at a place of worship that is only available several miles from the home. Although present CCL foster care regulations allow a child to practice their own particular faith, CCL does not require caregivers to drive the child to that child's specific desired place of worship other than making some other reasonable accommodation or arrangement. An additional example is some foster home caregivers may not have knowledge or experience in shopping for or cooking to meet the cultural dietary backgrounds or requirements of the child(ren) placed in their home.
- Recruiting a sufficient number of foster/resource families that are ethnically and culturally matched to the needs of children and youth in care is difficult. For example, there is a need for additional Indian resource families in order to better preserve connections of Indian children with tribes.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The CDSS has an ongoing plan for program improvement including providing technical assistance and information regarding program requirements to licensed or approved caregivers as part of the field review process. To further improve program accuracy, CDSS includes technical assistance answers on its website, in the form of an "information release" to field offices on all aspects of the program that may be confusing or misinterpreted to help ensure statewide program consistency. The CDSS website also includes a licensee self assessment tool to be used to improve program compliance.
- The CDSS has also made it a priority to meet with field staff and providers at conferences and similar events to collect input on potential problem areas with existing regulations. The emphasis of these meetings is to establish ongoing relationships for future communications and the development of methods or procedures to remedy any potential problems. It is hoped that with more complete feedback from the field and providers, statewide compliance may be achieved with more ease, and problem areas identified and resolved more completely at the earliest possible date.

ITEM 42:

Standards Applied Equally. Are the standards applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving Title IV-E or IV-B funds?

POLICY

In accordance with the intent and spirit of the ASFA Final Rule, all individuals who wish to be licensed or approved must meet the same standards. In order to ensure uniformity in licensing and approval practices, CDSS issues All County Letters, All County Information Notices and regulations so counties, providers and State staff are aware of changes in statutes, policies and procedures. These documents are available on the CDSS website.

Assembly Bill 1695 was enacted to conform State law with amendments to federal statutes and regulations relating to the placement of foster children in licensed or approved homes of non-relatives and relatives. Licensing/approval standards for foster family homes, kinship care homes and childcare institutions originate in State statutes, regulations and policies, and are applied consistently in each county statewide and in each category. The CDSS provides a central point of contact for oversight and technical assistance to counties to ensure uniformity in practice.

The standards apply to the following placement types, in which children served by the agency may be placed: foster family homes, kin caregivers, foster family agencies, certified family homes, and childcare institutions.

PRACTICE

- The CDSS provides technical assistance and training to ensure standards are maintained. Over the last several years, efforts have been focused on increasing consistency in standards for child placements. Consequently, licensing and approval standards are now consistently applied to all licensed and approved foster family homes and childcare institutions receiving Title IV-E or Title IV-B funds.
- In accordance with the intent and spirit of the ASFA Final Rule, all individuals who wish to be licensed or approved must meet the same standards. In order to ensure uniformity in licensing and approval practices, CDSS issues All County Letters, All County Information Notices and regulations so that counties, providers and State staff are aware of changes in statutes, policies and procedures. These documents are available on the CDSS website. Additionally, CDSS provides technical assistance and training to ensure standards are maintained.

MEASURE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Starting in March 2004, CDSS has conducted annual relative approval performance reviews of all 58 counties. Counties are required to document relative assessments on the State of California (SOC) 815, 817, and 818 forms. These forms are reviewed by CDSS staff to ensure the assessments have been done correctly and the relative and non-related extended family members' homes are safe and meet health and safety standards for licensed foster family homes.

CHALLENGES

Foster home licensing and relative approval functions are carried out across 58 counties by county staff and State staff. Uniformity of applying licensing regulations is a continuous challenge, particularly if agencies are understaffed.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- To improve program accuracy, CDSS provides web-based technical assistance in the form of an “information release” to field offices on all aspects of the program that may be confusing or misinterpreted. The website also includes a licensee self assessment tool to be used to improve program compliance. This helps ensure statewide program consistency.
- The Community Care Licensing central offices meet with field staff and providers at events to collect input on potential problem with regulations. These meetings establish ongoing relationships for future communications and the development of methods or procedures to remedy potential problems. It is hoped that with more complete feedback from the field and providers, statewide compliance may be more easily achieved and problem areas identified and resolved more completely at the earliest possible date.

ITEM 43:

Requirements for Criminal Background Checks. Does the State comply with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and does the State have in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?

POLICY

State law and regulations require criminal background checks that exceed federal requirements. State regulations require 15 years must elapse before a person convicted of a misdemeanor assault is eligible for a criminal record exemption, provided he/she submits substantial and convincing evidence of rehabilitation. Federal requirements bar a person convicted of a felony assault for only 5 years and the person is not required to submit any evidence of rehabilitation. State law requires a review of criminal records for all prospective foster parents, kinship care providers, adoptive parents and childcare institution staff. Criminal record checks are not limited to the applicants. Foster and adoptive applicants as well as all adults residing in the home of the applicant must be checked. In addition to conducting a review of criminal records, law also requires a check of the Child Abuse Central Index (CACI) maintained by the California Department of Justice (DOJ). If criminal history information is received from either the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) or the DOJ, the Department of Motor Vehicle records are checked to ensure that no conviction is overlooked.

Criminal background checks are conducted on all approved/licensed foster and adoptive families and staff of child care facilities. Health and Safety Code, Section 1522 requires that all licensed/certified/approved care providers have a clearance or a criminal record exemption prior to

licensure/certification/approval. All employees of a home that is licensed/certified/approved must also have a clearance or a criminal record exemption prior to working in the home.

A licensing agency must conduct criminal background checks of child care institution staff and foster and adoptive families. Background checks are required by statute and cannot be waived. For initial inquiries, the criminal information dissemination criteria for licensing are set forth in Penal Code Section 11105(m). By contract, the California DOJ sends state and county licensing agencies all subsequent history information as well. This continues until the licensing agency notifies DOJ that they are not longer interested in the individual.

PRACTICE

California has also provided funding for all 58 county child welfare services agencies to purchase electronic Live Scan equipment to facilitate the criminal records clearance process. In 1998, 1999, and 2000, DOJ purchased 500 Live Scan equipments and distributed them to multiple agencies. As of July 1, 2005, the DOJ no longer accepted fingerprint cards and all submissions were required to be made electronically, reducing the processing time. All facility applicants must use Live Scan electronic imaging which simultaneously checks the DOJ, FBI and the CACI. Under Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Section 309, the criminal records check for relatives or non-relatives is initiated as soon as possible and under certain circumstances, the child may be placed immediately if each of the adults in the home sign and submit a statement that he/she has never been convicted of a crime in the United States other than a traffic infraction (WIC, Section 309 (d)(3)).

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

According to the State Data Profile, abuse in licensed foster family homes or in homes certified by foster family agencies are reported at a rate of 1.06 percent, exceeding the National Standard of .57 percent. Since the State's automated child welfare information system cannot currently capture this data adequately, this figure does not include children placed with kin caregivers or in childcare institutions or finalized adoptive homes. Based on data from other sources, there are indications that this rate may be lower when these other placement types are included in the calculation. On the other hand, there may be inconsistent recording of this element from county to county, in which case the data may be under counted for this measure.

CHALLENGES

- The rigidity of the exemption guidelines sometimes eliminates potential caregivers for children needing placement. Achieving flexibility of guidelines while still assuring safety for children is an ongoing challenge.
- The timeliness of obtaining the results of criminal background checks often delays the placement of children with relatives. Applicants must meet the requirements of separate criminal background checks for foster care and adoption. Since a majority of adoptive families are also licensed foster care providers, a double screening of the applicants occurs. The criminal background check for adoptive applicants includes a full criminal record report, which contains information on arrests (as well as convictions). This process ensures the safety of children waiting for a permanent home.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Five Southern California Counties have engaged a contractor to develop an assessment tool for potential caregivers to address safety and risk factors and help match the needs of children with the appropriate caregiver. The tool is complete and is awaiting funding for automation.
- Assembly Bill 340 (implementation is estimated to be in mid-2008, pending the Children's Family Service's workgroup discussions/decisions) created a consolidated home study process for all potential caregivers that would replace the existing and duplicating processes for licensing foster families, approving relatives and non-related extended family members, and approving adoptive families.

ITEM 44:

Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Homes. Does the State have in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed in the State?

POLICY

Each county's recruitment efforts are tailored to its population and resource availability. Within a single set of statutory and regulatory provisions, counties are charged with recruiting foster/adoptive and relative caregiver families to meet the needs of at-risk children. California's Health and Safety Code provides the authority for the recruitment programs within the 58 counties. The description of California's recruitment strategies remain similar to the last review and are noted briefly below.

California statutes require specialized training for foster parents in the care of special needs children. It also provides for the expansion of recruitment activities for minority and sibling placements in compliance with federal law.

The California 2007 State Budget included a five percent rate increase for foster family homes, the first rate increase in six years.

PRACTICE

- The CDSS funds a toll-free adoption and foster care information service to improve public access to resources, information, and licensed adoption agencies throughout California. During normal business hours, this toll-free number is answered by staff trained to handle inquiries and make referrals to local public or private foster care and adoption agencies.
- California Kids Connection is a statewide public internet site that serves as an online adoption exchange registry and is linked to the national Adopt Us Kids website. The website lists children who have an adoption plan and contains a database of California families with approved adoption assessments and who want to adopt. Monthly exchange meetings serve to strengthen cooperative relationships between the public and private adoption agencies to accomplish goals of adoption.

- The focus of the following programs is to enhance outreach to ethnic communities, to encourage greater diversity among potential foster and adoptive parents and to increase the likelihood that children remain in their local communities:
 - The Latino Family Institute “Kinship Support Project” actively recruits and provides outreach to Latino relative caretakers. Services are provided to assist adoptive families by providing informational workshops, support services (family preparation, placement process, post-placement issues, and post-legal services), parenting classes, and bilingual services that focus on the unique experiences of kinship adoptions.
 - Community Task Force on Homes for Children (CTFHC) works with KPIX-TV to produce a monthly television segment that features success stories of foster and adoptive families. The CTFHC also works with CBS, Channel 5 to produce service announcements and interviews, which are aired on the station’s public affairs program. Targeted television segments are created for prospective foster and adoptive families that are identified by county needs. Also, a website (Bay Area Homes for Kids) is provided to disseminate information on adoption and foster care in English and Spanish. Both the television segments and website list a telephone number and email address for the public to obtain more information on foster and adoptive children.
 - Substance Abuse Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infant Program is administered under the purview of the Recruitment Network Development Unit and provides specialized recruitment, training and respite care services to counties for foster parents and federally eligible relative caregivers who care for infants and children aged newborn to 60 months, who are born substance-exposed and/or HIV positive, and who are court dependent children.

The continued operation of the above programs is contingent upon funding and the unknown effects of the expected California budget shortfall.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

The CDSS requires counties to complete a survey providing data on accomplishments related to recruitment, training, and retention of resource families. This information is summarized in the Resource Family Recruitment and Retention Annual Report. During State Fiscal Year 2005-2006 (July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006):

- A total of \$688,220 in Kinship Emergency Funds was expended in 43 counties to assist 2,088 resource families. This is a 59.9 percent increase over the previous year when 1,339 families in 40 counties used Kinship Emergency Funds. This is one indicator of the supports provided to resource families to improve retention.
- Thirty-nine counties financially sponsored 14,940 resource families to attend resource family recruitment, training and retention events. These events provide training, opportunity for resource families to interact with their peers, and exchange information.

- Statewide, 52 counties designated 790 individuals to recruit resource families. This total consisted of 632 county staff, 109 volunteers, and 49 contract staff and is evidence of county commitment.

CHALLENGES

- Due to budget constraints, it is challenging for CDSS to provide adequate funding to support, recruit and retain foster, adoptive and relative caregivers. California community colleges provide training for foster parents through the Foster & Kinship Care Education Training program. Resources families need ongoing training to support retention.
- Stakeholders reported the reimbursement rate for foster parents is low and has a negative impact on the recruitment of resource families. Although there has been no movement at the federal level to address this concern, the California State Legislature has approved a five percent rate increase to take effect in January 2008.
- The significant numbers of diverse, ethnic and cultural populations in California make it challenging to recruit culturally and linguistically appropriate resource families.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- The Family to Family Initiative focuses on meeting the needs of current foster families by ensuring the availability community resources. Community partners are actively involved in recruiting and supporting families in their own neighborhoods to increase accessibility to services and supports. Families are trained, supported and involved in all placement decisions.
- Two foster parent associations provide annual conferences that continue to be a valuable tool in the recruitment, training and retention of foster parents. At the conference, potential and licensed foster parents receive training from nationally recognized professionals and create networks of support. The CDSS supplements conferences through funding and participation.
- During National Foster Care Awareness Month each May, CDSS partners with Casey Family Programs and over 20 statewide organizations to host an event at the Capitol. During the event, foster and adoptive parents are acknowledged for their outstanding contributions. Many counties host similar events locally.

ITEM 45:

State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Permanent Placements. Does the State have in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children?

POLICY

California Family Code Section 7900, et. sec., designates CDSS as the “appropriate public authority” responsible for the administration of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC). The ICPC is the means for the member jurisdictions, including all 50 states, the District of

Columbia and the US Virgin Islands, to ensure protection and services to children who are placed across state lines for foster care or adoption. It establishes orderly procedures for the interstate placement of children and places responsibility for those involved in placing the child.

A goal of California's recruitment efforts is to ensure use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive placement. Under Family Code, Section 8708(c), a child's adoptive placement cannot be delayed or denied based on the prospective adoptive parent living outside the jurisdiction of the agency or the licensed adoption agency. To meet the intent of the law, California has implemented several policies, such as allowing public adoption agencies to conduct adoption casework activities outside their jurisdiction when it involves children who are court dependents.

Under Welfare and Institutions Code, Section 16100(b), public adoption agencies have the ability to contract with out-of-state public or private adoption agencies to provide adoption services for children who cannot adequately be served by a California adoption agency. In California, a child's Adoption Assistance Program benefit is based on the foster care payment of either the receiving county or state, if the child is placed outside of the financially responsible county. This regulation removes a potential barrier for cross-jurisdictional placements.

California uses cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive and guardianship placements. The number of cross-jurisdictional placements has decreased slightly over the previous three years and California is committed to further streamlining the adoption process by implementing the Adam Walsh Act. By continuing to revise State law and regulations and commensurate system changes, the number of cross-jurisdictional placements will begin to increase.

PRACTICE

California participates in ICPC with other states in which it has cases in common. Each county has an ICPC coordinator to help facilitate the process when children require a placement out-of-state.

Efforts at increasing the use of cross-jurisdictional resources for adoptive placements include recruitment strategies such as the California Kids Connection Program website. Statewide, five programs meet monthly to share specific information regarding family and children. A support coordinator is responsible for assisting in matching waiting children with available families identified by the exchange. Website visitors indicate their interest in specific children by sending an email to the placing agency identified for each child. Many public adoption agencies also maintain their own websites featuring children available within their county.

In April 2002, CDSS, in cooperation with the CWDA and the California Association of Adoption Agencies, sponsored an Adoptions and Permanency Planning Summit to promote permanency and plan strategies for the challenges to fund permanency and stability for all California's waiting children. One of the recommendations was to standardize the home study process. Legislation has been introduced to develop a family resource approval process. Another recommendation was to provide training to attorneys, judges and court staff regarding current laws, so court orders are consistent with those laws. The Judicial Review and Technical Assistance program provides training to these groups on cross-jurisdictional placements.

MEASURES OF EFFECTIVENESS

In State Fiscal Year 2005-2006 (July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006), a total of 220 cross jurisdictional adoptive placements were made by public adoption agencies. This number represents 3.0 percent of the total adoptive placements made during this fiscal year. The number of cross-jurisdictional placements decreased by $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 percent from 3.5 percent in State Fiscal Year 2004-2005 (July 1, 2004-June 30, 2005).

In State Fiscal Year 2004-2005, there were a total of 7,551 Public Agency Adoptions, and 471 (6.2 percent) of those were inter-county or interstate adoptions. In the State Fiscal Year 2005-2006, there were a total of 7,351 Public Agency Adoptions and 425 (5.8 percent) inter-county or interstate adoptions. These data suggest that the number and percentage of inter-county and interstate adoptions has not changed significantly over these two fiscal years.

PROMISING PRACTICES

- Assembly Bill 1808 (Chapter 75, Statutes of 2006) established a three-year project to increase adoption of foster youth, age nine and over, in four counties and one CDSS Adoptions District Office. Pre- and post-adoption services must be utilized to ensure the successful adoption of children who are at least age nine, have been in foster care 18 months or more, and are placed with an unrelated caregiver or in a group home. The legislation requires data collection and reporting and for CDSS to analyze the project and report its findings.
- 800-KIDS-4-US: The CDSS funds a toll-free adoption and foster care information telephone service to improve public access to resources, information, and licensed adoption agencies throughout California. During normal business hours, this toll-free number is answered by staff trained to handle inquiries and make referrals to local public or private foster care and adoption agencies. An average of 400 calls are received in the typical business month.

STATE ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND NEEDS



1. SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS

Permanency Outcome 2:

The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved.

This is an area of strength for California. In the first round of the CFSR, California was rated in substantial conformity in five of the six items under review. California has continued to excel in this area. Significant efforts are made to place children with relatives and after some challenges implementing the requirements of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act, the percentage of children whose first placement is with a relative continues to increase. At any given time, more children are placed with relatives, about 36 percent, than any other placement category. Over two-thirds of the children who exit from care in any given year exit to a family member, either through reunification, adoption or guardianship. KinGAP, including its recent expansion, represents a substantial commitment by California to supports children exiting foster care to guardianship with a relative. The Family to Family Initiative and other localized recruitment efforts means that children are most often placed in proximity to the neighborhood they were removed from and increased family and youth engagement efforts ensure family members, including siblings, maintain connections. Assembly Bill 408 and Assembly Bill 1412 both require that efforts be made to maintain relationships with individuals that the child or youth identifies as being important to them. Changes were also made in group home regulations to further ensure children and youth are afforded access to family members.

Well Being 3:

Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

In the 2002 review, California was found to be in substantial compliance in meeting the health needs of children. Although the state was not found to be in conformity related to mental health needs, improvements were made and the state passed this item in the PIP. California's Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care is a key component in the state's progress in this area. This program is a public health nursing program located in county child welfare service agencies and probation departments to provide public health nurse expertise in meeting the medical, dental, mental and developmental needs of children and youth in foster care. Health care has been a priority of the Schwarzenegger administration and the Mental Health Services Act has provided significant additional resources into the state's mental health services.

SYSTEMIC FACTORS

STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

California's CWS/CMS is capable of tracking the child's location, demographics and permanency goals for all children in foster care and their families. The system is used at every level of the child welfare system, providing critical information for timely child welfare intervention and case management. County and statewide data is available to child welfare administrators to support program management, budgeting and quality assurance activities. The enactment of Assembly Bill 636, placed increased importance on the need for accurate, timely and complete child welfare data. The CDSS has issued various All County Information Notices (ACINs) and All County Letters (ACLs) to assist counties in meeting critical child welfare services program documentation, data reporting, and program performance measurement requirements in accordance with Assembly Bill 636. The CDSS now routinely incorporates data entry instructions into ACINs and ACLs to remind county staff to follow program policy and data entry protocols to continuously improve data in CWS/CMS. From a broader perspective, and over the course of the last seven years, CDSS has issued approximately 23 directives aimed at enhancing the integrity of CWS/CMS data from a functional aspect or a program area level. Additionally, CDSS convenes a data committee comprised of CDSS staff, county child welfare agency representatives, and University of California, Berkeley to facilitate ongoing quality of data. This committee works in tandem with the CDSS policy committee to ensure that data integrity and associated policy support program quality. The CDSS, county child welfare agencies, and University of California, Berkeley are represented on the policy committee.

CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

The case review system is an area of strength for California. The State's statutes, court rules and regulations comply fully with federal requirements for written case plan, periodic reviews, permanency hearings, notice of hearings, and termination of parental rights. This is further demonstrated both by California passing the Title IV-E review and data indicating improving timeliness to permanency, both reunification and adoption. As part of the PIP, California increased efforts to engage families and youth in case planning. Legislation to extend the timeline for case plan development from 30 to 60 days allows more time for family engagement. Recent legislation has further improved the case review system by increasing noticing requirements for caregivers and opportunities to be heard in court (Senate Bill 1667 and Senate Bill 703).

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

California's new accountability system replaces the prior Child Welfare Services Oversight System which focused exclusively on regulatory compliance and brings California's oversight into alignment with the Federal Child and Family Services Review oversight system of the states. The strength of California's outcomes and accountability system is built on an open and continuously recurring three-year cycle of self-assessment, planning, implementation and review. State consultants work very closely with each county in providing technical assistance, monitoring data, and partnering together to improve outcomes for children and families. The State and counties utilize quantitative and qualitative data to achieve improvements in safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.

STAFF AND PROVIDER TRAINING

California's Child Welfare Training program provides consistent, high quality training that orients staff to the social and professional expectations associated with child welfare practice. The Statewide Training and Education Committee (STEC) provides an effective means to coordinate and standardize training across California's diverse, county administered system. This committee has representation from all facets of the child welfare system and collaborates to ensure that the training meets the statewide needs of the county child welfare agency social workers and the children and families that it serves. Subcommittees of STEC have developed and implemented high quality curriculum products that are delivered statewide. The Framework for Training Evaluation provides a sophisticated mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of statewide training, and also provides a model for evaluation of regional and county trainings.

2. SUMMARY OF AREAS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

Permanency Outcome 1:**Children have permanency and stability in their living situation.**

In spite of progress in improving timeliness of reunification and adoption, California has not met the national standards for any of the permanency composites. The State made progress by meeting the PIP goals in all permanency items except for the data indicators for both stability in foster care and foster care re-entry. Steady progress has been achieved in improving the timeliness of adoption; however, performance for children who have been in care longer than 24 months is below the national median.

ONSITE REVIEW

California has struggled to improve performance in both foster care stability and foster care re-entry. The onsite review would be a good opportunity to further explore practices that contribute to or are barriers to improved performance in both of these areas. For instance:

- When children are reunified, what services are provided to ensure the family is stabilized and able to care safely for their children?
- To what degree are the needs of the youth not being identified or services provided which result in increased risk to the youth becoming a delinquent and entering the foster care system through Probation?

Safety Outcome 1:**Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.**

Safety Outcome 2:**Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible.**

In spite of steady progress in improving the recurrence of maltreatment, California has not met the national standards for the safety composites. The State made significant progress by meeting the PIP goals in all safety items including the data indicators. Key strategies were implemented as part of the PIP and include the Standardized Safety Assessment System, which promotes a uniform practice of assessing safety, risk and needs; and, Differential Response which is a customized and individualized response to a family's strengths and needs. However, performance for children who are victims of repeat maltreatment is still below the national standard.

ONSITE REVIEW

The onsite review will be an opportunity to further explore practices that contribute to or are barriers to improved performance. Areas to explore during the onsite review include:

- How are counties doing in maintaining model fidelity of the standardized safety assessment tools? What are the quality assurance practices, such as are supervisors monitoring, that are utilized to ensure that the tool being used throughout the life of a case?
- Are there specific practices such as participatory case planning that are widely used within the county?

3. TWO ADDITIONAL SITES FOR ONSITE REVIEW

The onsite review takes place in three sites across the State. Los Angeles County, California's largest metropolitan subdivision is a required site and described at the end of this section. Fresno County and Santa Clara County were selected as the other two sites. The methodology for selecting the onsite review is determined on which counties are most representative of the State as a whole in population, ethnic diversity, capacity and consistency with statewide outcome performance data. Population and ethnic diversity are based on 2000 Census Data. Capacity, including ability, size and logistics are evaluated to ensure a selected site is sufficient and capable of facilitating the onsite review. This incorporates adequate case sampling levels, host facilities and services, and also weather considerations at the time of the review. Consistency with statewide outcome performance data is measured by comparing each county's individual performance with overall statewide performance data to enable the review team to explore any major issues emerging from the statewide assessment. Further, counties are balanced by factors that include collaboration with tribes, courts, probation and community partners; implementation of promising approaches like Family to Family; and, contrast among counties implementing Child Welfare Systems Improvement Pilot and type of safety, risk and needs assessment tools.

FRESNO COUNTY is located near the center of California's San Joaquin Valley, one of the richest and most productive agricultural counties in America. In 2000, the county's population was 799,407 with 59.5% Latino, 21.8% White, 8.9% Asian, 6.2% African American, 2.2% identified as

multi-racial, 1.4% Native American, and .1% Pacific Islander. Approximately 17.6% of families are living in poverty; the median income is \$34,725 for households and \$38,455 for families.

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is an integrated department mandated to provide public child welfare services and children's mental health services. Fresno County child welfare practices include Family to Family, Family Group Decision Making, Multi-disciplinary Teams, Wraparound, and ongoing collaboration with education, probation, and the courts. Mental health services span Early Mental Health Initiative through outpatient services including school based programs, a 24 hour children's crisis center, services for dual diagnosed youth, and services for youth and their family who are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Dependency Court.

There are three federally recognized tribes in Fresno County: Big Sandy, Cold Springs and Table Mountain Rancherias. A Department of Children and Family Services supervisor is a designated representative to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) Task Force. This person resolves communication problems; participates on Team Decision Making staffings; identifies voluntary maintenance services; and facilitates prompt notice and status review reports according to federal ICWA mandates. None of the local tribes have a tribal court, thus dependency must be maintained in the Fresno County courts.

Efforts to improve relationships with the court include: the Dependency Court judges meet with DCFS Assistant Director and the court social worker supervisor regularly; County Counsel meets monthly with DCFS program managers, supervisors, and court officers; and, county counsel represents DCFS and attends disposition hearings and trials.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY is a unique county in the bay area of Northern California encompassing two major cities, San Jose and Santa Clara. It has a total population of approximately 1.7 million people with approximately 500,000 being under the age of 18. The racial makeup of the county is 44.2% White, 2.6% Black or African American, .3% Native American, 25.4% Asian, 0.3% Pacific Islander, .2% from other races, and 3.0% from two or more races. 24.0% of the population were Hispanic or Latino of any race. By the year 2010, the demographics of Santa Clara County are expected to change to the point where Hispanics become a majority population. The per capita income per household is \$32,795 annually with 7% of the population living below the poverty line.

Santa Clara Children and Family Services underwent an extensive reorganization process in 2005 in order to improve service delivery for child welfare families. As a result, Santa Clara County has implemented the following practices to address the needs of the children and families in their County: Unified Children of Color task force, California Connected by 25 Initiative, educational rights project, Team Decision Making/ Family Group Conferencing, and Diversion and Intensive In-Home supervision Programs. The county maintains good relationships within the community and utilizes several family resource centers for service delivery.

Santa Clara has an excellent working relationship with their Juvenile and Probation presiding judges who chair the educational task force for foster and probation youth and meet on a regular basis with management of the child welfare and probation agencies.

Santa Clara County has taken a leadership role in the Connected by 25, developing several models for the other 4 pilot counties. The initiative aims to connect foster youth (ages 14-25) to the community, education, housing and resources so they are able to be self sufficient by the age of 25. The county is linked with most of the Bay Area colleges and universities in order to ensure the aging out foster youth are connected with their communities. In addition, Santa Clara has over 80 beds in the housing program and has provided the residence model for other counties.

The Educational Rights project taskforce, comprised of multiple non-profit educational rights groups, legal advocacy groups, social workers, and probation, ensures Individual Educational Plans are completed and the goals are being met. The taskforce also ensure the children are connected with further education, employment assistance, and/or vocational education.

In addition to Santa Clara and Fresno counties, Los Angeles is the third county for the Onsite Review.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY is located in the southern region of California and has the largest child welfare population in the state of California. In 2000, Los Angeles County had a population of 9,948,081 of which 46.8% were of Latino or Hispanic ethnicity, 29.5% were identified as White/Caucasian, 9.7% were identified as African American/Black, 13.1% were identified as Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 0.3% was identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native. Approximately 16.7% of families are living in poverty, and the median household income is \$43,518. Of the 77,773 children currently in out-of-home care in the state of California, Los Angeles County has 26,925 of those children in their jurisdiction.

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) consists of 16 regional offices and 8 Service Planning Area's (SPAs) throughout the County with the headquarters located in downtown Los Angeles. A snapshot of Los Angeles County child welfare practices includes Differential Response (known as Points of Engagement), Family to Family, Multi-Disciplinary Teams, Wrap-around, and Multi-Assessment Team. Additionally, DCFS collaborates with community-based organizations; Departments of Education, Probation, Mental Health; Los Angeles Commission for Children and Families; Children's Planning Council; Interagency Council on Child Abuse; and, the Chief Administrators Office, Service Integration Branch.

Los Angeles County is participating in the Title IV-E Waiver project and is one of the Eleven Pilot County Project sites, testing innovative practice and approaches to child welfare. The county child welfare agency has also increased efforts to improve communication with Dependency Court, Delinquency Court, and other court jurisdictions.

COMMENTS ON STATE'S EXPERIENCE WITH THE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT AND PROCESS

California recognizes the value of a systematic statewide assessment of child welfare services to determine the strengths, needs, and areas of continuous program improvement. The process generated valuable information that will assist CDSS in its continuous improvement efforts. The CDSS is particularly appreciative that our many collaborative partners and stakeholders statewide assisted in this endeavor. However, with any undertaking of this magnitude, there were significant challenges.

The timeframe within which to conduct and write the assessment report presented challenges, especially in light of the need to include the diverse population of stakeholders that make-up California's population. Stakeholder input is critical to the assessment process and is highly valued by the State, therefore, having more time to gather and synthesize feedback was needed.

While appreciating the need to place a limit on the length of the assessment report, an expectation that California can prepare a document of this scope containing no more than 75 to 85 pages in length is unrealistic. It is hoped that in the future, the Instrument will be updated rather than rewritten, allowing the states to more precisely compare the progress it has made during the period following the previous round of reviews.

The timeline for the Administration for Children and Families approval of the two counties selected for the onsite case review, in addition to the largest urban center, is just 60 days before the Onsite review. Two months is simply insufficient time for both the State and counties to adequately organize the site specific details, case review sampling, and preparation processes. Allowing for more time between the assessment phase and the onsite review would be helpful as many of the onsite review activities occur during the completion of the assessment report.

The CFSR process is very thorough, providing the State with a mechanism for assessing progress, aligning program areas, long term planning, and program improvement. California would like to see this process replace the Child and Family Service Plan to enable the State to focus resources. The multiple required federal reports associated with child welfare create a strain on limited resources and are often redundant.

4. PARTICIPANTS IN THE STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee provides oversight for the CFSR process including the Statewide Assessment, Onsite Review, and any subsequent Program Improvement Plan. The Committee is composed of individuals representing government, community-based organizations, and stakeholders. It is co-chaired by Mary L. Ault, Deputy Director of the Children and Family Services Division, California Department of Social Services and Charlene Reid, Chair of the California Welfare Directors Association, Children's Committee.

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CAROL RITCHIE, Retired, Director of
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Statewide Assessment Team

The Statewide Assessment Team (SAT) convened on four occasions during the months of July and August 2007. Each day-long meeting focused on a specific area of safety, permanency, or well-being. The meetings were highly interactive and had a two fold purpose: 1) to discuss California's status on the various measures of effectiveness and systemic factors in the CSFR Statewide Assessment Instrument in comparison with the last review; 2) to provide input on any changes in performance or lack thereof.

The Team was composed of stakeholders representing courts, tribes, youth, parents, foster parents, probation, philanthropy, child welfare training, and child welfare at the county and State level. It was co-chaired Glenn Freitas, Chief, Children's Operation and Evaluation Branch, California Department of Social Services and Kathy Watkins, Operation Subcommittee, California Welfare Directors Association.

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Child Welfare Data Analysis Bureau,
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Data Team

The Data Team provided support to the Statewide Assessment Team's analysis of the State's progress, strengths and needs. The Team was a subcommittee of the CDSS Data Committee that meets year-round to ensure data integrity of the Outcomes and Accountability system. The Team was co-chaired by Ellie Jones, Chief, Children's Operation Bureau, CDSS and Kathy Watkins, Children's Operation Subcommittee, Child Welfare Directors Association.

TERESA CONTRERAS, Chief,
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The CDSS extends its gratitude to the following for assisting with the Statewide Assessment.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

The CDSS is deeply appreciative of the following collaborative partners who contributed time and expertise to assist with the Statewide Assessment. This and all your efforts reflect your tremendous efforts to improve outcomes for California's children and families.

Administrative Office of the Court
 Child Welfare Director's Association Children's Committees and Operation Subcommittee
 Co-Investment Partnership
 Indian Child Welfare Act Workgroup
 Probation Advisory Committee
 State Interagency Team

CHILD WELFARE STAKEHOLDERS

The CDSS is extremely grateful to the over 225 individuals who contributed their perspectives at the Statewide Stakeholder Convening and extend a special thank you to the following for their contributions as panel members and speakers:

Opening Remarks John A. Wagner, Director, California Department of Social Services
 Sharon M. Fuji, Regional Administrator,
 Administration for Children and Families

Panel Members Mary L. Ault, California Department of Social Services
 Honorable Richard C. Blake, Chief Judge, Hoopa Tribe
 Judith A. Cox, Chief Probation Officers Association of California
 Jerry Milner, Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families
 Charlene Reid, County Welfare Directors Association
 Don Will, Administrative Office of the Courts

Speaker Stuart Oppenheim, Child and Family Policy Institute of California

Luncheon Presentation Pat Pianko, Region IX, Administration for Children and Families
 Deutron Kebebew, Former Foster Youth
 Sayida Sandoval, Parent Mentor

Closing Remarks Honorable Michael Nash, Judge, Presiding Juvenile Court Judge,
 Los Angeles County

Moderator Glenn Freitas, California Department of Social Services

The pre-convening reception was hosted by the Co-Investment Partnership. Thank you for welcoming our guest and participating in the Stakeholder dialogue.

Regional Focus Groups

Hundreds of stakeholders from throughout California contributed their valuable time, commitment, and intelligence to the thirty-one focus groups that were held around the state in preparation for the Stakeholder Convening. Thank you for your help with this very important process. We are also appreciative of the dozens of Child Welfare staff and partners throughout the State who assisted the Child and Family Policy Institute of California in bringing together stakeholders for the following focus groups.

Region	County	Focus Group	Date
Bay Area	San Francisco	Courts	7/20
Bay Area	Alameda	Youth	7/26
Bay Area	Alameda	Public Health Nurses	7/26
Bay Area	Contra Costa	Kinship Care Relatives	7/23
Bay Area	Mendocino/Lake	Tribes	7/25
Mountain Valley	Sacramento	Parents	7/26
Mountain Valley	Sacramento	Education	7/16
Central	Fresno	Youth	7/18
Central	Fresno	Tribes	7/23
Central	Fresno	Foster/Adoptive Parents	7/18
Northern	Shasta	Courts	7/27
Northern	Shasta	Tribes	7/27
Southern	Orange	Courts	7/19
Southern	Los Angeles	Mental Health	7/9
Southern	San Diego	Tribes	7/24
LA	Los Angeles	Courts	7/18
LA	Los Angeles	Youth (2 groups)	7/30
LA	Los Angeles	Parents	7/11
LA	Los Angeles	Relatives	7/23
LA	Los Angeles	Training	7/18
Statewide	Sacramento	Adoption District Offices	7/19
Statewide	Sacramento	Family Resource Centers	7/30
Statewide	Sacramento	CADPAC	7/11
Statewide	Sacramento	California Alliance Committee	7/20
Statewide	Alameda	Public Health Nurses	7/17
Statewide	Sacramento	Probation Advisory Committee	7/19
CWDA Subcommittee	Riverside	Adoption	7/17
CWDA Subcommittee	Los Angeles	Independent Living Program	7/30
CWDA Subcommittee	Sacramento	Licensing and Relative Approval	7/11
CWDA Subcommittee	Alameda	SW/Statewide Training & Education Committee	7/13

CALIFORNIA CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

In addition, we would like to give special recognition to the California Child and Family Policy Institute of California (CFPIC) staff: Patricia Bresee, Stacie Buchanan, Lynn DeLapp, Dana Fabella, Lisa Molinar, Stuart Oppenheim, Joni Pitcl, and Tiifany Tyler for their diligence in conducting focus groups across the state, analysis of the peer quality case review reports, and the coordination of the Statewide Stakeholder Convening.

TECHNICAL WRITING

The CDSS would like to thank CalSWEC for assisting with the development of the Statewide Assessment report, especially the technical writing team of Ray E. Liles, DSW, LCSW, and Cathy Cimbalo, MSW.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The CDSS, Children and Family Services Division, wishes to acknowledge the many staff who contributed to the CFSR process. Your commitment to the children and families of California is commended.

